Routledge Hindu Studies Series

HINDU-CHRISTIAN DUAL BELONGING

Edited by
Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohran

Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging

This book focuses on dual belonging within Hindu-Christian contexts. Written by experts in a variety of fields, the chapters explore the theological, philosophical, and cultural anthropological debates relating to religious pluralism, religious language, and social identity while addressing the fact that both Hindu and Christian forms of self-understandings have been significantly moulded through their interactions in South Asia and across certain Euro-American horizons. The limits of the definition of dual belonging are tested via case studies, and contributors address the question of whether there is anything distinctive about dual belonging across Christianity and Hinduism specifically.

A timely contribution to the emerging subject of dual religious belonging, this book will be of interest to academics in the fields of Hindu studies and Christian theology, Hindu-Christian comparative theology, religious pluralism, interreligious relations, the sociology and anthropology of religion, and comparative theology and philosophy.

Daniel Soars teaches in the divinity department at Eton College, UK. He received his PhD degree from the University of Cambridge, UK, for a comparative theological enquiry into the distinctive relation between the world and God in Christianity and Hinduism.

Nadya Pohran received her PhD degree from the University of Cambridge, UK. She is a cultural anthropologist currently working as a part-time professor and applied anthropologist, whose research explores existential belonging, interreligious relations, and the interdisciplinary conversations between anthropology and theology.

Routledge Hindu Studies Series
Series Editor: Gavin Flood
Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies

The R*outledge Hindu Studies Series*, in association with the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, intends the publication of constructive Hindu theological, philosophical and ethical projects aimed at bringing Hindu traditions into dialogue with contemporary trends in scholarship and contemporary society. The series invites original, high quality, research level work on religion, culture and society of Hindus living in India and abroad. Proposals for annotated translations of important primary sources and studies in the history of the Hindu religious traditions will also be considered.

Indian Perspectives on Consciousness, Language and Self
The School of Recognition on Linguistics and Philosophy of Mind
Marco Ferrante

Vaiśeṣikasūtra – a Translation
Ionut Moise and Ganesh U. Thite

Politics and Religion in Eighteenth-Century India
Jaisingh II and the Rise of Public Theology in *Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism*
Sachi Patel

Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging
Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohran

Goddess Traditions in India
Theological Poems and Philosophical Tales in the Tripurārahasya
Silvia Schwarz Linder

For more information about this series, please visit: https://www.routledge.com/asianstudies/series/RHSS

Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging

Edited by Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohran

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2022
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2022 selection and editorial matter, Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohran; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohran to be identified as the authors of the editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters, has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Soars, Daniel, editor. | Pohran, Nadya, editor.
Title: Hindu-Christian dual belonging / edited by Daniel Soars, Nadya Pohran.
Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2022. | Series: Routledge Hindu studies series | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2021045923 (print) | LCCN 2021045924 (ebook) | ISBN 9780367647841 (hbk) | ISBN 9780367696276 (pbk) | ISBN 9781003142591 (ebk)
Subjects: LCSH: Christianity and other religions—Hinduism. | Hinduism—Relations—Christianity.
Classification: LCC BR128.H5 H5535 2022 (print) | LCC BR128.H5 (ebook) | DDC 261.2/45—dc23/eng/20211001
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021045923
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2021045924

ISBN: 978-0-367-64784-1 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-0-367-69627-6 (pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-003-14259-1 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

We consider ourselves extremely fortunate to have pursued our PhD research under the supervision of Dr. Ankur Barua at the University of Cambridge. This volume is dedicated to him: thank you, Ankur, for sharing your inspiring, thought-provoking, wise, and patient reflections about religion, existential belonging, individual identity and many other matters of philosophical and spiritual importance.

Daniel and Nadya

Taylor & Francis
Taylor & Francis Group
http://taylorandfrancis.com

Contents

Acknowledgements ix
List of contributors xi
Foreword xiii

1 Introduction: both, between, or beyond? An introduction to Hindu-Christian dual belonging 1
NADYA POHRAN AND DANIEL SOARS

2 Negotiating dual belonging: a study of the sociocultural history of the St. Thomas Christians of India 16
RENISH GEEVARGHESE ABRAHAM

3 *Neither myself nor another* – the interreligious belonging of Raimon Panikkar 33
MICHAEL BARNES SJ

4 The possibility of Hindu-Christian dual belonging: anthropological reflections on a theological debate 51
ANKUR BARUA

5 Considering the case of Catholic-Hindu dual belonging from a magisterial and dogmatic point of view 69
GAVIN D'COSTA

6 Where we start, who we are, and what we seek: the born versus the convert "dual belonger" 88
RACHEL FELL MCDERMOTT

7 The comparative theology of Francis X. Clooney SJ and the question of theological dual belonging 106
MARTIN GANERI O.P.

8 Non-dual conversion and non-dual belonging: trajectories of religious transformation in missionary Advaita Vedānta 122
REID B. LOCKLIN

9 Hindu, Christian, Hindu-Christian, and beyond: exploring the relations between identity and spirituality 140
JEFFERY D. LONG

10 The struggle of belonging: considering some on-the-ground realities of multiple religious orientation 157
NADYA POHRAN

11 Inculturation, belonging, and defining "religion": some reflections on Sara Grant and the Christa Prema Seva Ashram 175
DANIEL SOARS

12 Christian Sannyāsa: dual belonging or a bridge too far? 193
PETER TYLER

Index 211

Acknowledgements

The seed of this volume has been incubating for quite some time. Although we cannot pinpoint the precise time and place, in all likelihood, the idea of exploring "dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity" was spawned at the pub over one of our many conversations about life, faith, belief, religion, identity, and community. We can therefore begin our notes of gratitude by thanking our many inspiring colleagues and friends in Cambridge who so readily spurred us on in our discussions.

Once we knew we wanted to explore the topic, it seemed natural to try to bring together some of the foremost experts on the subject from within the field of Hindu-Christian studies. While we were not able to invite every scholar whose voice we wished to weigh in on the discussion, we were fortunate enough to gather together a wonderful group in July 2018 for a conference which was generously funded by the Teape Trust. We organised the conference like an intimate round table; we knew we wanted it to be as dialogical as possible, so we asked the contributing authors to circulate their papers beforehand and read everyone else's. We were delighted by the depth of engagement and we feel that the high level of cross-fertilisation contained within this volume is due to the willingness of the authors to engage deeply with each other's thoughts and writings.

Some of our conference delegates were not able to participate in this particular volume, but we nonetheless wish to thank them for their rich contributions to the conference: thank you to Muthuraj Swamy, Elisabeth Arweck, Eleanor Nesbitt, Swami Chidbrahmananda (Vance Greenway), and Mario Aguilar. On the other hand, some of our contributing authors agreed to participate in this volume even though they were not able to be present at the conference itself: thank you to Rachel Fell McDermott and Renish Geevarghese Abraham for your willingness to bring yourselves up to speed on the volume's existing contents and to contribute your unique insights to our collaborative explorations.

The author-to-author dialogues continued long after the conference ended. Our contributors offered a friendly peer review of each other's chapters, which strengthened and deepened the cohesiveness of the volume. We also want to thank the external reviewers who offered critical insights on the volume's contents: thank you specifically to Kerry San Chirico, Francis X. Clooney SJ, Catherine

Cornille, Jeanine Diller, Julius Lipner, Bradley Malkovsky, Anantanand Rambachan, Michelle Voss Roberts, and several other anonymous reviewers.

Finally, we would both like to thank the Swamis and friends we met at Swami Dayananda Ashram, Rishikesh, in 2017 (Daniel and Nadya) and again in 2020 (Nadya) during the Vedānta camps we attended. In particular, we greatly benefited from Swami Tattvavidananda's helpful teachings, meditations, and satsangs. Our exposure to and participation in the ashram setting deepened our understanding of certain aspects of Hinduism and also allowed us to raise and explore questions we had pertaining to Christian spirituality.

Daniel Soars and Nadya Pohran
July 2021

Contributors

Renish Geevarghese Abraham is Senior Lecturer at St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi. He was the Westcott-Teape Lecturer in 2017 and delivered three lectures at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge, on the topic "Negotiating Hinduism and Christianity in Kerala." He has published reviews and articles in *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflections* and is actively involved in translating early Malayalam travelogues into English.

Michael Barnes SJ is Emeritus Professor at the University of Roehampton, research associate at the School of Advanced Study, University of London, and a visiting lecturer in Interreligious Relations in the Cambridge Theological Federation. He has just published *Waiting on Grace: A Theology of Dialogue* (2020) and is now turning his attention to a monograph bringing together Christology and interreligious relations.

Ankur Barua is University Senior Lecturer in Hindu studies at the University of Cambridge. One central focus of his research is Vedāntic Hindu philosophical theology. His recent publications include *Debating "Conversion" in Hinduism and Christianity* (Routledge, 2015) and *The Vedāntic Relationality of Rabindranath Tagore: Harmonizing the One and Its Many* (2018).

Gavin D'Costa is Professor of Catholic Theology at the University of Bristol. He acts as an advisor to the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales and to the Anglican Church on matters of interreligious dialogue and theology. His two recent books are *Vatican II. Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (2014) and *Catholic Doctrines on the Jewish People after Vatican II* (2019).

Rachel Fell McDermott is Professor and Chair of the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Cultures at Barnard College, Columbia University. She specialises in Bengal and Bangladesh, goddess worship, and interreligious dialogue and has authored *Revelry, Rivalry, and Longing for the Goddesses of Bengal: The Fortunes of Hindu Festivals* (2011). She is currently engaged in writing a two-volume project on the National Poet of Bangladesh, Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Martin Ganeri O.P. is a fellow of Blackfriars Hall, Oxford and Prior Provincial of the English Province of the Order of Preachers (Dominican Order). Among

his recent publications is *Indian Philosophy and Western Theism* (Routledge, 2016). He is currently working on a monograph for Lexington Books, *Hindu Thought and Christian Reflection: Imaginative Thinking*.

Reid B. Locklin is Associate Professor of Christianity and Culture at the University of Toronto. His research focuses on a range of issues in Comparative theology and Hindu-Christian studies. His most recent publication is *Vernacular Catholicism, Vernacular Saints: Selva J. Raj on "Being Catholic the Tamil Way"* (2017). He is currently completing a comparative theological study of Christian and Advaita Vedānta theologies of mission.

Jeffery D. Long is the Carl W. Zeigler Professor of Religion and Philosophy at Elizabethtown College. Recent publications include *Historical Dictionary of Hinduism* (2020) and *Hinduism in America: A Convergence of Worlds* (2020).

Peter Tyler is Professor of Pastoral Theology and Spirituality and Director of the Centre for Initiatives in Spirituality and Reconciliation ("InSpiRe") at St Mary's University, Twickenham, London. His most recent monograph is *Christian Mindfulness: Theology and Practice* (2018). He is also a UKCP-registered psychotherapist and contributes to the current dialogue between spirituality and psychotherapy.

Foreword

Though a lived experience for centuries, especially in Asia, dual or multiple religious belonging has become a topic of reflection in the West only in the past few decades.[1] As the awareness of religious plurality and choice has become omnipresent, and attachment to any one religious tradition somewhat weakened, individuals have often come to configure their religious identity by drawing from more than one tradition. The reality of dual belonging manifests itself in different ways and raises different questions depending on the traditions involved and the kind and degree of identification with two or more traditions. The religions most often involved in Christian experiences of dual belonging are Hinduism and Buddhism. Many of the early exemplars of dual belonging were Christians deeply engaged with these traditions, and Hinduism and Buddhism – or at least certain strands of these traditions – are often regarded as particularly compatible with Christianity. While a number of books have appeared on Buddhist-Christian dual belonging, this is the first volume that focuses specifically on the history and experience of religious hybridity involving Christianity and Hinduism.

Among the many different types of teachings and practices captured under the term Hinduism, Christians have identified predominantly with its traditions of non-duality. Early pioneers of Hindu-Christian dual belonging, such as Henri Le Saux, Raimon Panikkar, and Sara Grant, spent their lives attempting to reconcile their experience and understanding of the tradition of *Advaita Vedanta* with their Christian faith. In these cases, the question of dual belonging presents itself not as a matter of identification with random elements of different faiths, but as a matter of the possibility of reconciling the religious elements of one tradition with the philosophical framework of another tradition, if such distinction between religious and philosophical elements is even possible. However, Hindu-Christian dual belonging may also focus on more theistic traditions, whether through the

1 The first conference on the topic took place in Brussels in 1999 and was organized by the *Voies de l'Orient*. It brought together Christians from various centres in Europe who were involved in the introduction of teachings and practices from Asian traditions. It led to the publication of Jacques Scheuer and Denis Gira, eds., *Vivre de Plusieurs Religions. Promesse ou Illusion?* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atelier, 2000). My own edited volume *Many Mansions. Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) was also inspired by that conference.

practice of occasional visits to the shrines of the deity or deities of the other religion or through the deep spiritual engagement with devotional texts of the other tradition. Whether and how all these different forms and degrees of identification may truly qualify as forms of "dual belonging" may thus be open for questioning.

This volume brings together various approaches to the phenomenon of Hindu-Christian dual belonging. Some are more descriptive, taking stock of lived experiences of dual belonging, while others offer a more critical and constructive reflection on the possibility of Hindu-Christian dual belonging. Some approach the phenomenon from the perspective of the individuals claiming dual belonging, reflecting on the reasons why dual belonging may be necessary or desirable, and what respective religions might learn from the experience. Others approach it more from the perspective of the traditions involved, reflecting on questions of theological consistency, practical feasibility, and spiritual desirability. All these perspectives contribute richly to our understanding of Hindu-Christian dual belonging as well as to the broader discussion of the porousness of religious identity.

Catherine Cornille

1 Introduction

Both, between, or beyond? An introduction to Hindu-Christian dual belonging

Nadya Pohran and Daniel Soars

How and where can someone experience a sense of belonging when their religious identity and spiritual practice do not fall neatly within the boundary lines of a single religious tradition?[1] It might seem relatively straightforward to consider how either a Christian or a Hindu who is *not* existentially drawn to traditions other than their own would go about belonging to their religious community: they would likely seek belonging alongside their respective Christians or Hindus, either inside or outside a formalised or institutionalised spiritual or religious context. But does this process of belonging change when the individual in question is not *only* a "Christian" or *only* a "Hindu" but has formed their own religious identity through actively merging and melding elements from these two traditions? What does belonging look like, where does it occur, and what circumstances (both internal and external) must be present in order for belonging to take shape for individuals who consider themselves to partake in more than one designated tradition?

Spurred on by these questions, this edited volume seeks to explore some of the dynamic modalities – past and present – in which individuals, ideas, and institutions have indwelt the spaces of Hinduism and Christianity. As such, the essays are contributions to the emerging literature on the theme of dual (or multiple) religious belonging and engage with theological, philosophical, and cultural anthropological debates relating to religious pluralism, religious language, social identity, and comparative theology. At the same time, they also highlight aspects of the ongoing reformulations of the category of "Hinduism" in South Asia and across the world, as Hindus have sought to reposition their traditional beliefs and practices – in modes which are alternately adversarial, hospitable, and antagonistic – vis-à-vis Christian doctrines and experiences.

The phenomenon of dual belonging is linked to the type of cross-cultural and transnational spiritual searching that has long occurred in religious milieus. Catherine Cornille, for example, has argued that across many periods and cultures "multiple religious belonging may have been the rule rather than the exception,

1 Thank you to our external and internal reviewers whose helpful comments and questions have been influential in shaping not only the content of the individual chapters but also the content of this introduction.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-1

at least on a popular level."[2] Over the last 300 years, both Hindu and Christian forms of self-understanding have been significantly moulded through their interactions in South Asia and across certain Euro-American horizons. Christians have occasionally turned to the wisdom traditions of Vedāntic Hinduism to recuperate a mystical sense of the presence of the divine reality in the everyday,[3] while some influential Hindu gurus have reformulated aspects of Christian doctrines from within Indic styles of beliefs and practices.[4]

These chapters discuss, from various theological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives, a vital question that relates to these dense negotiations: are the products that emerge from such re-envisioning through the lenses of the other sufficiently continuous with their doctrinal-experiential-institutional prototypes to be recognisable as "Hinduism" or "Christianity"? In other words, what is the result of an individual or a group of individuals who seek to draw actively upon both Christian and Hindu philosophies, worldviews, beliefs, and practices when forming their own sense of spirituality – and how might this dynamic process be categorised and conceptualised?

The dialogical development of this volume

The majority of the chapters within this volume were presented as papers at an interdisciplinary conference hosted at the University of Cambridge in 2018. In an interreligious context where so much knowledge transfer and development hinges on dialogue, it seemed fitting to approach the exploration of Hindu-Christian dual belonging dialogically. In addition to the style of the conference, we designed an editorial process in which the contributors read each other's chapters and provided thoughtful feedback on how another author's ideas and arguments overlapped with, or differed from, their own. This peer-to-peer feedback strengthened the way in which each of our contributors' ideas were challenged and/or supported not just by external reviewers but by the very scholars whose work sits alongside theirs in this volume.

The richness of this dialogical approach was further complemented by personal experiences pertaining to dual religious belonging. All the authors of this volume have a deep sense of familiarity with either (or, often, both) Hinduism or Christianity as faith traditions in their own right. This is true even for those whose content is not focused exclusively on Hinduism and Christianity (Rachel Fell McDermott, for example, brings the richness of Islamic contexts into our volume,

2 Catherine Cornille, *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 1–2.

3 For example, Francis X. Clooney, *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013). See also the writings of Henri le Saux (Abhishiktananda), Bede Griffiths, and Sara Grant.

4 For example, Swami Prabhavananda, *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta* (Calcutta, India: Vedanta Press & Bookshop, 1964); Sri Ramakrishna, *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna* (Calcutta, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1994).

with her exploration of individuals who are born into a family where two or more religions are practised). While it is certainly not unique for scholars of religion to have some personal experience with the religions they are writing about, we feel that this depth gave a notable strength to these chapters and we are grateful to our authors for this.

Adapting questions from Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson's volume which explores dual belonging within Buddhist and Christian contexts,[5] we shaped our call for papers with the following questions:

1 Can Christian and Hindu understandings of the human situation and journey be reconciled without loss, or is the Hindu-Christian a confused follower of two pathways leading in different directions?
2 Is dual belonging really possible when doctrinal elements of each faith seem to contradict?
3 Does dual belonging necessarily subordinate one religion to the framework of the other (or to some other third framework) or can it liberate both faiths from past cultural frameworks; and how separable is either religion from its cultural and material expressions?
4 What are some of the conceptual and practical difficulties of dual religious belonging?
5 What are some of the methodological tools and theoretical frameworks through which to consider dual religious belonging?
6 What is the relationship between dual religious belonging and comparative theology?

Dialogue was at the forefront and core of our approach in the conference that ensued in response to these questions. In order to maximise time for discussion, each of the papers was circulated and read in advance by all authors, as well as by select respondents. The dialogical nature allowed us to pose, and explore, a number of additional questions which have since shaped the content of the papers that were originally presented, but also guided us as editors to approach additional authors whose work could respond to some of the themes raised. These questions included:

7 Why does literature around dual belonging so often include a Christian context as one of the religious traditions in question?
8 Why, in Hindu-Christian contexts, are conversations disproportionately filled with individuals from Roman Catholic backgrounds who are interested in Advaita Vedānta?
9 What do we all mean by the crucial word "belonging" in dual religious belonging?

5 Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson, eds., *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations* (Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2016).

10 How do various frameworks of power come into play in any discussion of belonging?
11 What are the spaces – both temporal spaces and cultural/religious spaces – that are most conducive to multiple religious belonging?

Four ways of understanding/defining belonging

Like any scholarly discussion worth its salt, it did not take long for our conversations to turn to interrogate the very categories we were exploring. Our dialogue seemed to revolve especially around the need to further articulate an answer to question number 9, namely: what precisely did we each mean by the word *belonging*? We offer four possibilitlies:

(1) Some of us understood belonging as the process in which spiritual authorities within a particular religious tradition either grant or withhold an identity ("Christian," "Hindu," etc.) based on the individual's adherence to doctrine. In this first sense, belonging was part and parcel of a hierarchical power structure (either personal or institutional) in which it was either granted or not. Belonging, similar to membership, could be granted or denied – not unlike a border control officer who alone possesses the ability to stamp someone's passport and, by doing so, permits them to enter and remain within a particular country.
(2) For others of us, belonging was less like the authority's stamp of approval on a passport and more akin to whether other residents welcomed an individual into their midst once they were allowed to enter the proverbial lands. This understanding of belonging was more slippery and harder to pin down than a top-down granting of belonging, as it was constantly negotiated through multiple interpersonal relations among both peers and authorities alike and thus depended upon the individual in question receiving an ongoing acceptance by other community members. In this second sense, the threads of power which brought about belonging did not appear to run down from the top of an established hierarchy but were rather cross-woven and stitched throughout the broader community of individuals. It was the multitude of individuals within the community, not a singular authority, who decided whether or not belonging was granted to the individual who sought it.
(3) Others of us understood belonging as a self-contained mental exercise: could an individual, through a sort of logical and metaphysical acrobatics, manage to reconcile, and thus hold in tandem, two notably different ways of perceiving the world? If understood in this sense, belonging to two traditions seemed conceptually incoherent because the very idea of two absolutes is logically contradictory. And, if the individual in question belonged only to the "hybrid" spaces – that is, the in-between places of two or more religious traditions – then they belonged not to two places but only to one: an existentially fuzzy hybrid space, not amenable to the conceptual jurisdiction so

favoured by religious traditions. Thus, their belonging was not *dual* or *multiple* but singular.

(4) And still others of us placed the concept of belonging into a somewhat different conceptual category. Rather than focusing on whether or not an individual "belonged" to a community (through the acceptance and affirmation of either select authorities, the broader community, or one's own self-driven logics), in this fourth sense, belonging was understood as something that individuals strived to experience in relation to God. In this vein, participating in – or even (socially) "belonging" to – a community was not the end of belonging in and of itself. Rather, community-based participation and/or any of the aforementioned types of belonging were simply a means to the end of one's ultimate quest to belong to God.

One way of coming at this contested notion of belonging is to ask the following question: are dual belonging individuals *both, between*, or *beyond*? That is: is the individual who operates within a combination of Hindu and Christian milieus *both* a Hindu and a Christian through living in such a way that he/she indwells both traditions, perhaps even simultaneously? Are they *between* both traditions, occupying a sort of hybrid interstitial space whose legitimacy is deeply contested from traditionalist perspectives? Or are they *beyond* the very concept of categorising their spiritual practice by aligning themselves with an established tradition, thus, somewhat paradoxically, transcending the categories of religious identity altogether? We will see this matrix of questions picked up and answered in various ways in the forthcoming chapters.

Grappling with the is-ought problem in an interdisciplinary setting

While formulating these understandings of belonging, we realised that, no matter which conception we narrowed in on, there were significant differences between our theory-based constructions of belonging and the ways that belonging occurred (or did not occur) on the ground in people's lived experiences. Our conference consisted of theologians, philosophers, anthropologists, and sociologists, and we referred to these differences of theory and practice as, respectively, the "ought" and the "is."

As we see it, a large role of scholarship, certainly where the relationship between theology and anthropology is concerned, is constantly to navigate a dialectic between the "ought" and the "is." Theologians and philosophers articulate, for the most part, the "ought" and the world of possibilities, while social scientists explore the "is" and the world of occurrences. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the exchanges at our conference, we found ourselves addressing both the "is" and the "ought" of belonging in the span of a single conversation. We often struck up against stark limitations when we endeavoured to take our theory-driven understandings of belonging and compare them with real-world examples of individuals and communities who strived to participate in multiple religions.

The philosophical concept of *nāmarūpa*, as it is understood in Advaita Vedānta, proved to be a helpful tool in our is-ought navigation. *Nāmarūpa*, a Sanskrit word literally translated "name and form," embodies the concept that the physical and material world is intrinsically limited by the very fact that it is bound in space and time. *True nature*, as opposed to *nāmarūpa*, is the nameless and formless Absolute. Everything within the world of names and forms is, by this understanding, an incomplete if not erroneous version of true reality.

In this vein, we could not help but think that all our articulations of dual religious belonging were part and parcel of the *nāmarūpa* reality: that is, our theories and categories for dual religious belonging were akin to the process of giving a name and a form to something that seemed fundamentally beyond articulation and expression. And yet – and here lies the crux of where the concept of *nāmarūpa* proved to be particularly helpful in our exploration – we were struck that *nāmarūpa* does not *just* entail a philosophical argument for a nameless and formless Absolute reality. It *also* provides a philosophical and spiritual motivation for engaging with the world of names and forms at all: it is only through inhabiting *nāmarūpa* that any of us can speak of the Absolute. So, too, is it only through our interdisciplinary grappling – even if somewhat provisionally or incompletely – with the themes of identity, belonging, religious communities, and individuals' sentiments that we are able sometimes to glimpse the reality of multiple belonging.

Thus, while we envision this volume to contribute primarily to both the burgeoning exploration of multiple religious belonging and the subdiscipline of Hindu-Christian studies, the interdisciplinary manner in which this volume has taken shape could equally offer something of substance to the emergent and ongoing conversations between theology and anthropology. Many of these conversations pivot around the central idea that each discipline contains specific methodologies and theoretical lenses that one can offer the other. The anthropologist Joel Robbins, along with others, has suggested that anthropology can "take" some of the theoretical frameworks used by theologians.[6] Theologians have started incorporating certain ethnographic approaches into their inquiries, thereby utilising the methodological approaches (such as long-term participant observation) that have been deeply embedded in anthropology since Bronislaw Malinowski's unexpected stay in the Trobriand Islands in 1915.[7] For our part, we experienced the value (and, indeed, the challenge) of mixing together our disciplinary approaches and areas of expertise when still very much in the early stages of forming and articulating our own arguments and ideas. It was through intentionally coming together, dialogically, and creating a discursive space that we were able to grapple with the is-ought problem.

6 Joel Robbins, "Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 285–94.

7 N. Wigg-Stevenson, *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Dual and multiple religious belonging – the current state of the conversation

Questions pertaining to religious identity and navigating multiple distinct traditions are especially pertinent in the emergent discussions of dual (or even multiple) religious belonging. Though here we are primarily concerned with *dual* belonging – our own context being the two traditions of Hinduism and Christianity – our authors' discussions draw on, and contribute to, ongoing conversations about multiple religious belonging more generally. By dual or multiple religious, we mean when an individual draws from two or more otherwise distinct religious or spiritual traditions in order to form their spiritual identity and/or practice *and* who experiences some degree of belonging in both of those traditions. As some of the authors in this volume point out, there is an ambiguity surrounding the point at which an individual who draws upon two or more distinct traditions ought to be classified as a dual belonger – for example, it is well known that Thomas Aquinas draws from Jewish and Muslim thinkers when exploring some of the deepest questions in Christian theology, but he is not normally referred to as a "dual belonger" in this regard. Thus, it is important to try to articulate what is meant by "belonging," even if we ultimately conclude – as some of our authors do – that a universal and straightforward definition is hard to find.

Dual belonging falls under the umbrella of multiple belonging, which is gaining increasing traction in scholarship as more and more individuals grapple with the process of forming a religious practice (and, at times, being a part of a religious community or multiple communities) that involves more than one religious tradition. Scholars who look at multiple religious belonging have already pointed out that religious hybridity is increasing alongside factors like globalisation.[8] Whether they arrived at involvement with multiple religious traditions due to being born to parents who come from separate traditions or marrying someone from a different tradition than their own, or exploring multiple religious traditions as part of their spiritual searching, more and more individuals are experiencing some degree of multiple religious orientation.

In the way we write of it here, the phenomenon of dual belonging is notably distinct from the increasing affiliation with Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR) – a point that Linda Mercadante elaborates on in her excellent exploration of the lived experiences of SBNR individuals in the United States.[9] Although it could be worthwhile to blur the categorical lines of SBNRs and dual religious individuals in order to elucidate some of the shared experiences of navigating one's own spiritual tradition (and, in doing so, perhaps to understand more clearly the shared reasons for why there is a rising public interest in both phenomena), that is not something we are doing here. Rather, we are specifically examining the ways that

8 Jeanine Diller, "Which Ultimate(s) Would Theology Without Walls Be About," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51 (2016): 499–505.

9 Linda A. Mercadante, *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

individuals seek to draw from, participate in, and belong to one or more religious traditions – hence, *dual* (or multiple) *religious*.

So, what does the identity of a dual or multiple religious individual actually look like? In the context of exploring questions pertaining to the traditions of Hinduism and Christianity, there are many options for how any one individual might self-identify. Some individuals might think of themselves as simultaneously both a Hindu and a Christian. Or they might instead think of themselves as distinctively a Hindu at some parts of the day and year and as distinctively a Christian at other parts of the day and year. Alternately, they might think of themselves as a Hindu-Christian or as a Christian-Hindu (in such cases, one select religion retains its place as the primary identifier, e.g. Hindu-*Christian*, and the second is the descriptive qualifier, e.g. *Hindu*-Christian),[10] and still others might think of themselves as a Christian who has absorbed some insights from some Hindu traditions, texts, and/or practices, or as a Hindu who has learnt the same from some Christian ones (we might think of comparative theologians like Francis Clooney who is a *Christian* learning from *Hinduism*).[11] Any combination of these could be considered a form of dual religious expression. Such identities are rarely fixed or stagnant; rather, individuals can move between being, say, a Christian influenced by Hinduism, to a Hindu-Christian, or to a Hindu and Christian.

While this book is the first edited volume that explores the phenomenon of dual belonging from within the particular context of Hinduism and Christianity, there is a significant body of literature from within Hindu-Christian studies which addresses certain aspects of the themes that arise in this book. A classic work which comes readily to mind is the book by Klaus Klostermaier, *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban*.[12] Klostermaier writes a personal account of his time spent living in Vrindaban and the theological struggles and insights he encountered during that time. He contrasts the life of a theologian living "in the field" rather than

10 See, for example, Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2013).

11 Those familiar with Clooney's work will be aware that he advocates for far more specificity and nuance than I have been able to work succinctly into this summary and, furthermore, that he is adamant that this process of learning from another tradition is a deep process which unravels slowly over time. In my reading of his own self-understanding, Clooney would not speak of himself as a "Christian learning from Hinduism" but would rather be more accurately described as a *Roman Catholic* (or even, more specifically, a *Jesuit*) learning from certain *Advaita Vedāntic* texts, the theistic Vedānta of Rāmānuja, and Tamil devotional texts. Clooney makes it clear that these nuances and specificities are important, since it is through careful and close learning of another tradition – as well as a nuanced awareness of our own tradition – that we are able to engage in comparative theological learning at all. Indeed, in coming across the idea that one could be "a Christian learning from Hinduism," someone might rightly ask, "a Christian *from which context?*" and "learning *which aspects* of *which Hinduism?*" Nonetheless, Clooney is often offered as an example in scholarship of a dual belonger – see, in this volume, Martin Ganeri's chapter and Nadya Pohran's chapter which explores some of the theoretical frameworks offered by Theology Without Walls scholars, which are used to categorise multiple religious individuals.

12 Klaus Klostermaier, *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969).

in the library and consistently claims that living in India alongside Hindus has pushed him towards certain theological insights that he would not otherwise have had. There is also J.L. Brockington's thematic study, *Hinduism and Christianity*,[13] which highlights the central concerns of both traditions, as well as their internal diversities and historical developments. The final chapter deals with the history of contact and dialogue between the two religions, but there is no explicit focus on dual belonging. Harold Coward's edited volume *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*[14] is similar to Brockington's insomuch as it touches upon the ways that dialogue has occurred in both past and present-day encounters between Hindu and Christian traditions. The volume also looks imaginatively to the future and explores some of the challenges that individuals or communities within Hindu and/or Christian milieus might face as they try to navigate their religious and spiritual beliefs and practices. While these three books are "classics" in the broader field of Hindu-Christian studies, which touch on some of the themes relating to Hindu-Christian encounters that are discussed in our volume, they do not address the issues explicitly in terms of the motif of dual religious belonging. Some of these themes can also be found within the type of comparative theology popularised by figures like Francis Clooney since the 1980s, in which individuals are firmly rooted within a singular religious tradition and then look to a second tradition in an attempt to learn from it.[15] Again, though, the actual notion of dual belonging has not received much attention hitherto even within comparative theology.

Moving outside the context of Hinduism and Christianity, there are several recent books which explore the phenomenon of dual/multiple belonging. A significant majority of these explorations are grounded within Christianity. Catherine Cornille's edited volume, *Many Mansions: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*,[16] explores the phenomenon of individuals who identify themselves as followers of more than one religious tradition. There are chapters which focus on the theoretical aspects of multiple or dual religious belonging (e.g. by Cornille and Werner Jeanrond) and some which examine the status and meaning of "other" religious traditions from within a Christian perspective (e.g. by Jacques Dupuis and Raimon Panikkar). Gideon Goosen's *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging* focuses on what precisely it means to have a (dual) religious identity (e.g. what this implies for an understanding of the "self").[17] It also includes discussions of dual belongers who are well known in the field of

13 J.L. Brockington, *Hinduism and Christianity*, 1st ed. (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992).

14 Harold G. Coward, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

15 Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

16 Cornille, *Many Mansions?*

17 Gideon Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging* (Oxford and New York: Peter Lang AG, 2011).

Hindu-Christian studies such as Henri le Saux, Jules Monchanin, Bede Griffiths, and Raimon Panikkar.

Some of the essays within P.J.R. Rajkumar and J.P. Dayam's volume, *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging*, focus primarily on Christians who become dual-faith practitioners after taking on Buddhist or Hindu practices.[18] Others focus on dual-faith practice in areas of Asia where this has long been the norm. Some of the essays mention interfaith families as a source of multiple religious practice. All the writers look at this topic through a Christian lens (or a "Christian and" hyphenated perspective) and focus on its meaning for Christian theology. A special topical issue of *Open Theology* contains both empirical and hermeneutical approaches to the ever-growing phenomenon of multiple religious belonging.[19] The first section of articles focuses on articulating and interrogating hermeneutical aspects of multiple religious belonging, providing important vocabulary and concepts for the discussion. The second section of articles, which draws upon qualitative research conducted in a variety of national and religious landscapes, provides real-world examples of individuals and communities who navigate multiple religious contexts. They also address several challenges encountered by the concept of multiple religious belonging, sometimes challenging the very terminology of "multiple religious" and "belonging" itself.

Looking to Hindu-Christian studies' neighbouring field, Buddhist-Christian studies, there are also several influential books that have approached the topic of dual belonging. Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson's volume, *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*[20] was an invaluable resource as we created thematic questions to guide our own authors. Paul Knitter's, *Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian*,[21] is a personal account of Knitter's experiences in navigating both Christianity and Buddhism in forming his own spiritual practices and beliefs. The book is aimed, Knitter explicitly states, at individuals from a Christian background who are open to engaging dialogically with Buddhist ideas, concepts, and practices. Knitter draws upon his own life experiences to demonstrate some of the motivations and challenges of dual belonging. There is also Rose Drew's book *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*, which lays out a clear, cohesive, and convincing theoretical framework through which dual belonging can be understood in the context of Buddhism and Christianity, grounded in case studies of six real individuals.[22]

18 Peniel Rajkumar and Joseph Dayam, eds., *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2016).

19 André van der Braak and Manuela Kalsky, "Introduction to the Topical Issue 'Multiple Religious Belonging,'" *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (December 20, 2017): 662–64.

20 D'Costa and Thompson, *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging*.

21 Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*.

22 Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging* (London, UK: Routledge, 2011).

The distinctive contribution of this volume

Given that the burgeoning topic of dual (or "multiple") belonging is not unique to the Hindu-Christian context, we might ask the question: is there anything distinctive about exploring dual belonging from within Hindu and/or Christian milieus? That is, is there anything peculiar about belonging to Hinduism and Christianity which would make belonging to *these two particular* religious traditions different from belonging to other traditions? This question can be further complexified: what precisely does it mean to *belong* within both Hindu and Christian understandings of the term? Posing these questions alongside each other compels us to consider whether there are features specific to being *Christian* or *Hindu* (as opposed to, say, being Jewish), which would have a particular bearing on the possibilities and the parameters of dual belonging as such (i.e. which would determine the extent to which one could be Christian or Hindu and belong to *any* other religious tradition at the same time).

It also forces us to ask whether there is something specific about being *Christian* which would be determinative of the possibility or ways in which one could also be *Hindu* or whether there is something specific about being *Hindu* which would be determinative of the possibility or ways in which one could also be *Christian*. These difficult questions are addressed by our authors from a variety of perspectives, but there are two basic points of departure. One can work *de*ductively by establishing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions that constitute Hindu-Christian dual belonging – "from the top down" – and then see if and how they map onto any real-world or imagined examples, or one can work inductively by beginning *in medias res* and building upwards towards a working understanding of the concept as it emerges from lived examples.

Some of the chapters in this collection thus offer philosophical and theological analyses (often guided by the resources of a specific tradition) of the semantic and conceptual boundaries of dual religious belonging both as a phenomenon in the abstract and with reference to the particularities of a Hindu-Christian framework. Ankur Barua examines both the theological possibilities and the anthropological actualities of the double inhabitation of two religious universes by analysing the three key terms – "dual," "religious," and "belonging." He argues that "dual religious belonging" is conceptually incoherent from a philosophical-theological perspective, and yet that from some anthropological perspectives, it is "singular religious belonging" which could become – or perhaps has already become – existentially implausible in certain milieus. The chapter also provocatively suggests that "dual religious belonging" resists definition, especially if we are looking for a definition involving necessary and sufficient conditions. Gavin D'Costa addresses the themes of the volume from a Roman Catholic doctrinal perspective. He uses the conditions that have been positively decided by the magisterium as applicable to Hebrew Catholics as a test case for possible Catholic-Hindu dual belonging. He discusses the principle of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the Church) and examines various positions in theology of religions (pluralism, exclusivism, and inclusivism), as well as the vexed issue of inculturation. On the

basis of his analogy with Hebrew Catholics, D'Costa suggests that Catholic-Hindu dual belonging might exist and flourish under certain conditions and within certain doctrinal parameters. Two chapters explore dual belonging through the lens of the theology of conversion. Reid B. Locklin offers a survey of several theological and social-scientific treatments of conversion as a cross-cultural phenomenon and then focuses on the specific understanding of conversion that emerges from one strand of missionary Hinduism, the non-dualist tradition of Advaita Vedānta. He argues that missionary Advaita proceeds by the gradual transformation and perfection of rival religious views rather than their explicit exclusion. The result is a form of religious belonging that is neither exclusive nor multiple, but non-dual. Jeffery D. Long also explores the relationship between conversion and belonging. Drawing upon John Henry Newman's reflections on religious conversion and on his own personal life story, Long suggests – perhaps counter-intuitively – that conversion does not always entail a radical shift in one's worldview. He shows how it can also emerge from a process of discovery in which one realises that the tradition in which one was raised no longer reflects one's deepest commitments. This can lead a person to supplement their original identity with another (as in the case of a dual identity, such as a Christian becoming a Hindu-Christian) or to shift entirely to a new identity (such as a Christian becoming a Hindu). What changes is thus not so much one's "inward" orientation towards ultimate reality as the "outward" expression of this orientation.

Other authors ground their explorations in, or focus on, concrete examples of individuals and communities which might be seen as "test cases" for the type of dual belonging being explored. Michael Barnes SJ writes about Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010) – one of the most prolific and enigmatic religious thinkers of our age, who spent most of his life exploring the tantalising edge that separated the Hinduism of his Indian father from the Catholicism of his Spanish mother. To try to understand something of Panikkar's unique experience of dual religious belonging, Barnes concentrates on two contrasting texts: *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, which provides the kernel of Panikkar's deeply Christian intuition about the relationship of religions and spirituality, and his monumental commentary on early Brahmanical Hinduism, *The Vedic Experience*. Peter Tyler focuses on the French Catholic priest Henri Le Saux (1910–1973), later known as Swami Abhishiktananda, as perhaps the twentieth century's best-known Hindu-Christian "dual belonger." Theologically formed in the early twentieth century to see Hinduism and other religions as presenting a "lesser truth" than that found in Christianity, he had his categories swept aside by an encounter with the ageing mystic seer Ramana Maharshi (1879–1952) in the 1950s. The rest of Le Saux's life and ministry was spent subsequently trying to reconcile these two visions: of traditional Roman Catholicism and *advaita* Hinduism. The chapter looks at the possibility of Christian *sannyāsa* concentrating on the life and writings of Le Saux. In his chapter, Renish Geevarghese Abraham focuses on the St. Thomas – or "Nasrani" – Christians of Kerala, who trace their origins back to the legendary Brahminical conversions made by St. Thomas the Apostle in 52 CE. Abraham shows how this ancient Christian community lived side by side with the Hindus of Malabar, assimilating and adopting many Hindu practices over a period of 15 centuries until the

arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century CE. He explores how this unique form of dual belonging contributed to the survival of Nasrani Christianity and to its assertion as a powerful political force through history.

Many of the chapters contain aspects of both the conceptual and the empirical. Martin Ganeri considers the comparative theology of Francis X. Clooney SJ, who is the leading modern proponent of a sustained Christian encounter specifically with Hindu theological traditions. Ganeri argues that Clooney's comparative theology is invulnerable to any charge of incoherence or syncretism, but whether it actually counts as a form of religious dual belonging is, Ganeri contends, a question to be answered by each tradition engaged with. In the final analysis, he suggests that the controversial nature of religious dual belonging means that it may well be best to dispense with this label in order not to detract from the value and success of comparative theology taken on its own terms. In her chapter, Rachel Fell McDermott distinguishes between the "convert" dual belonger – the person who chooses as a mature adult to include another religious tradition in his or her religious orbit – and the "born" dual belonger – someone who by birth feels at home in more than one tradition. Focusing on the born dual belonger, she then discusses this phenomenon with the help of two case studies: the poet Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899–1976), who became dual, showing Muslim and Hindu cultural fluency because of his environmental context in early to mid-twentieth-century Bengal, and the author herself, who grew up with a Christian mother and a father who had taken initiation into the Ramakrishna Order. Nadya Pohran brings her ethnographic fieldwork at a Christian ashram in India into conversation with certain philosophical and conceptual frameworks offered by existing scholarship in order to interrogate the assumption that multiple religious *identification* necessarily leads to genuine *belonging*. Her primary objection to existing models is that multiple religious identification is often considered in isolation from larger community contexts. Specifically, she examines the at-times complicated relational dynamics between the Christian ashramites of Sat Tal Christian Ashram (STA) and a group which she calls World Amrita (WA). In his chapter, Daniel Soars contends that the particular dialectic between Hinduism and Christianity *does* result in a distinctive form of dual belonging because the meeting of these two traditions (as opposed to other possible combinations) puts pressure on certain doctrines and practices in ways that are distinctive to the Hindu-Christian case – not least, the relative (un)importance of history to Christian and Hindu belonging. He also uses postcolonial and feminist theological critiques to argue that the historic entanglements of these two traditions mean that the very asking of a question about dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity risks perpetuating and reinforcing a particular way of viewing religious traditions as composed of invariant cores. Soars grounds his conceptual arguments in the lived example of Sara Grant and her Christa Prema Seva ashram.

Limitations

Metaphorically invoking *nāmarūpa* in the way we did previously has its limits. We do not want to put forth the argument that there is a singularly real expression

of the phenomenon of multiple or dual belonging. Nonetheless, we experienced first-hand that our efforts of applying categories, theories, and concepts (and even exploring lived examples of multiple belonging as it plays out in Hinduism and Christianity) to the phenomenon of dual belonging always seemed to fall just a little short. Still, there is a usefulness and practicality to creating models to explore something – even if they are still incomplete or inaccurate iterations of the thing itself.

Just like the world of names and forms, the models and explorations of multiple and dual religious belonging that we discuss in this volume are, without a doubt, limited. We are limited by our disciplinary approaches, the historical time periods we have selected, and the particular religious traditions or individuals whose doctrines and life experiences we chose to examine. But these limits are, we hope, useful ones. In the same way that physical walls or borders create a structural integrity which preserves the space in between them, the natural limitations of our authors' selected (and varied) disciplinary approaches have succeeded in giving an integrity to the phenomenon we are all exploring herein.

If dual religious belonging entails (1) a deep relational connection to multiple religious communities, (2) an unwavering sense of belonging to God, and (3) simultaneous adherence to seemingly contradictory doctrines, while assuming that (4) both traditions that the individual is participating in hold a complete understanding, and doctrinal acceptance, of the other traditions' doctrines – then perhaps we are discussing an idea of dual belonging that simply does not exist. Somewhere in the back and forth of our early discussions, someone raised the following thought:

> [M]aybe there is a problem in the concept that we have been running after, if we are not able to find any actual expression of dual-religious belonging . . . and, thus, maybe we are "off" if we are trying to construct a philosophical concept that we can't actually find any examples of.

As is the case with all models which help our limited selves contemplate limitless concepts, there is always the possibility that we will outgrow the sophistication of the current model/s. We see this, quite concretely, time and time again in the hard sciences – say, the model of the atom, for example – and it is only sensical to apply the same possibility to social scientific, theological, and philosophical models. Our hope is that, as the study of multiple religious belonging deepens and widens, the models, theories, and ethnographically informed cases that we explore here will continue to prove useful and thought-provoking in gaining an ever-deeper understanding of the realities, beauty, and challenges of navigating the world as a multiple religious individual.

References

Braak, André van der, and Manuela Kalsky. "Introduction to the Topical Issue 'Multiple Religious Belonging.'" *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (December 20, 2017): 662–64.

Brockington, J.L. *Hinduism and Christianity*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992.
Clooney, Francis X. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
———. *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.
Cornille, Catherine. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Eugene, OR: Orbis Books, 2002.
Coward, Harold G. *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Perspectives and Encounters*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.
D'Costa, Gavin, and Ross Thompson, eds. *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*. Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2016.
Diller, Jeanine. "Which Ultimate(s) Would Theology Without Walls Be About." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51 (2016): 499–505.
Drew, Rose. *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*. London, UK: Routledge, 2011.
Goosen, Gideon. *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*. Oxford and New York: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2011.
Klostermaier, Klaus. *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969.
Knitter, Paul F. *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2013.
Mercadante, Linda A. *Belief without Borders: Inside the Minds of the Spiritual but Not Religious*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.
Prabhavananda, Swami. *The Sermon on the Mount According to Vedanta*. Calcutta, India: Vedanta Press & Bookshop, 1964.
Rajkumar, Peniel, and Joseph Dayam, eds. *Many Yet One? Multiple Religious Belonging*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches Publications, 2016.
Ramakrisha, Sri. *Teachings of Sri Ramakrishna*. Calcutta, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1994.
Robbins, Joel. "Anthropology and Theology: An Awkward Relationship?" *Anthropological Quarterly* 79, no. 2 (2006): 285–94.
Wigg-Stevenson, N. *Ethnographic Theology: An Inquiry into the Production of Theological Knowledge*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

2 Negotiating dual belonging

A study of the sociocultural history of the St. Thomas Christians of India[1]

Renish Geevarghese Abraham

> *They used to observe the custom of other Malabaris of not touching the low castes, and if they happen to touch them they wash themselves, not because of the superstition of the gentiles who believe that, if they touch the low castes, they get polluted as they say, which is the same as irregular, until they wash themselves; but because they live among the Nairs, if they touch low castes, Nairs will not be able to touch them, and thus they will lose contact, the communication of life, the purchases and sales and the honours of the kings, because with the Christians and the Nairs can communicate and deal, because both are of noble castes, and for the same reason with the Brahmins.*[2]

The epigraph to this chapter is an extract from the first book of *Jornada* of Aleixo (Alexis) de Menezes, the Catholic Archbishop of Goa, originally written in Portuguese in 1603 by Antonio de Gouvea and published in Coimbra, Portugal, in 1606. The original title of the book provides a picture of the Portuguese perception of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar[3] and their sociocultural life in the sixteenth century. An English translation of the title is as follows:

> The journey of the Archbishop of Goa, Dom Frei Alexis de Menezes, primate of East India, of the Order of St. Augustine. When he went to the Serras

1 This paper is a revised version of the first lecture in the series of Teape lectures I delivered at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge from 25 to 28 October 2017. I wish to acknowledge the Teape Foundation and its trustees for their support and guidance in the publication of this paper.

2 Antonio de Gouvea and Pius Malekandathil, eds., *Jornada of Dom Alexis de Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar* (Kochi: LRC, 2004), 258.

3 V. Nagam Aiya in *Travancore State Manual* uses the term "Malabar" to signify the whole coast or territory extending from Gokaranam, which is on the western coast of India to Cape Comorin, Travancore, being the chief province in the region thus composed. See V Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual* (Trivandrum: Travancore Government Press, 1906), 306. Malabar is the word generally used by early travellers to denote modern Kerala. Until the nineteenth century, neither Kerala nor Travancore was mentioned by any pioneer who has left accounts of his experience as a traveller.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-2

> (Mountains) of Malabar and to the places where inhabit the ancient Christians of St. Thomas, he brought them back from many errors and heresies, in which they were found and reduced them to our Holy Catholic Faith and to the Obedience of the Holy Roman Church, from which they had remained separated for a thousand years.[4]

It is clear from the title and the epigraph that Menezes, being a conservative Roman Catholic, could not accept the customs and practices of the St. Thomas Christians which were caught between the dynamics of Christian and Hindu[5] traditions. While the Portuguese identified the community as heretical and erroneous, the St. Thomas Christians were proud to uphold and assert their identity with reference to these two worldviews.

This study springs from two parallel preoccupations: while pursuing my doctoral research on the history of the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar popularly known as Syrian Christians and the multiple layers of their identity formation, I was curious to note the caste-based determinism and gender inequalities in this community and the dynamic ways in which St. Thomas Christianity established itself in Malabar as an indigenous Christian community. Second, it was a matter of curiosity to many political observers when a section of this community despite their pride in the antiquity and legacy of the community as a pre-existing form of local Christianity in India did not have any hesitation to align with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the recent legislative assembly election campaigns in Kerala.[6] The history of the St. Thomas Christians of Kerala is central to any discussion on the origin and growth of Christianity in Kerala and in India because they are an indigenous community that dates its foundation to a period before the church in Western Europe established itself. They trace their origins to the legendary Brahmanical conversions made by St. Thomas the Apostle who is believed to have landed in Malabar in 52 CE. However, from the perspective of cultural studies in India, I argue that until the encounter with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century CE, the Hindus of Malabar and the St. Thomas Christians shared a world in common which enables scholars to understand the hegemonic history of Kerala in a better light. The study of the St. Thomas Christian community is critical to the study of religion in India because it is the only recorded instance in the history of India where Christianity existed and survived for centuries, in a unique manner, within the dominant regional culture which later came under the religious category of

4 de Gouvea and Malekandathil, *Jornada,* III.

5 I wish to clarify that my use of the word Hindu is non-essentialist. I am using it in the context of Malabar in the precolonial period for the sake of convenience and not to refer to a religio-cultural phenomenon with fixed properties or doctrines. My use of the word shall therefore refer to the indigenous people and the religio-cultural phenomena in Malabar which were later designated as "Hindu" in the post-Portuguese period.

6 The BJP endorses the Hindutva ideology of the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which works towards recreating India as a Hindu nation.

"Hinduism." The two millennia of the existence of this community are the history of a subtle negotiation between Christian and Hindu ways of life.

This chapter focuses on the history of a critical yet constructive interaction between Christian and Hindu practices that took various interpretative forms in a pluralistic culture sustained in Malabar from the advent of Christianity in Malabar. I analyse the dynamic nature of St. Thomas Christianity in Malabar with reference to its two dimensions – one, related to its ritualistic and ecclesiastical life derived from Syrian/Syriac traditions of West Asia and the other, related to its political affiliation to Hindu Kings; its adoption and indigenisation of Brahmanical norms of purity and pollution; and its adherence to practices linked with food, language, and culture. Besides introducing this ancient Christian community with reference to its history, customs, and practices, mostly derived from some of the upper-caste Hindu practices which the community assimilated and adopted over a period of 15 centuries, the object is also to identify how this dual belongingness contributed to its survival and assertion as a powerful political force through history.

I feel that it is important to begin with an exploration of the use of the term Hinduism as religious category especially in the context of the precolonial times in India. Romila Thapar in her pioneering study on religious identity in India argues that there has not always been a well-defined and historically evolved religion which we now call Hinduism and an equally clearly defined Hindu community.[7] The origin and development of Hindu identity or the perception of Hinduism as a religion is in fact based on the historiography of the last two centuries and therefore partly a consequence of the colonial experience and the nationalist resistance towards colonial hegemony. The term "Hindu" originally was not associated with any religious identity until Western missionaries and Orientalists from the eighteenth century in their enthusiastic attempt to "discover" the essential religious identity and culture of the so-called "Hindoos" started using it in the modern sense of the term. The term "Hindu" is the Persian variant of the Sanskrit word *Sindhu*, which refers to the Indus River. Heinrich Von Stietencron, the renowned German Indologist, claims that the term appears in old Persian cuneiform inscriptions from the time of Darius I, who expanded his empire as far as the Indus in 517 BCE.[8] It is therefore evident that this word originally denoted a particular geographical area and did not have the specific religious connotations which emerged in the modern age. Thapar's argument poses a methodological problem in terms of understanding Hinduism as a religious category in precolonial India. This is especially true in the history of Kerala because the consolidation of the Brahminical social system happened in Kerala only after the mass migration of Brahmins to South India in the eighth and ninth centuries CE. There has been no

7 Romila Thapar, "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity," *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1989): 210.

8 Gunter D. Sontheimer and Herman Kulke, eds., *Introduction*, *Hinduism Reconsidered* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), 12.

evidence of the use of the term Hindu as a religious category before the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century CE.

My study of St. Thomas Christianity in Kerala poses a similar kind of problematic. The community has a complex history which spans approximately two millennia. When we study the history of St. Thomas Christianity in the first 15 centuries of its existence (the period before its encounter with the Portuguese in the sixteenth century CE) with reference to Thapar's argument on Hinduism, it is difficult to perceive it as a religious community. The idea of a separate religious entity seems to have shaped up in this community only after the Portuguese tried to destroy its liturgy and legacy. It is interesting to explore how the St. Thomas Christian identity was perceived and constructed by both the imperial powers and the indigenous people of Malabar. While the Portuguese used the term St. Thomas Christians, it was Adriaan Moens, Dutch Governor of Cochin, who first used the term Syrian Christian in 1770 to refer to the St. Thomas Christians.[9] He used this term with reference to the Syriac liturgy and traditions that they used. His purpose in prefixing the term Syrian was also to distinguish the St. Thomas Christians from the "New Christians" who were converted from lower caste groups by the Portuguese. Francis Buchanan, the East India Company surgeon, who visited Travancore in 1800 used the word *Nazareny* with respect to the St. Thomas Christians.[10] He seems to have adopted this word from his interaction with some of the St. Thomas Christians and Brahmins. M Kurien Thomas in his study of the evolution of St. Thomas Christian identity claims that the term used by the St. Thomas Christians to refer to themselves is *Nasrani*.[11] This is the indigenous variant of the word *Nazareny*. This term, which means follower of Nazarene (Jesus of Nazareth), has its origin in Persian and was first used by Persian Christians to identify themselves as distinct from the Christians of the Roman empire.[12] It was used by the St. Thomas Christians and later indigenous people of Kerala following other religious beliefs as a label to refer to the St. Thomas Christians. In the course of time, this term became an integral part of the St. Thomas Christian identity. St. Thomas Christians are often addressed as Marthoma[13] or Malankara[14] Nasranis. However,

9 A. Galletti, A.J. Van Der Burg, and P. Groot, *The Dutch in Malabar: Being a Translation of Selections Nos. 1 and 2 with Introduction and Notes* (Madras: Superintendent Government Press, 1911), 92.

10 Francis Buchanan, *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, Performed Under the Orders of the Most Noble the Marquis Wellesley, Governor General of India, for the Express Purpose of Investigating the State of Agriculture, Arts, and Commerce . . . in the Dominions of the Rajah of Mysore, and the Countries Acquired by the Honorable East India Company* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1807), 391–93.

11 Many scholars of St. Thomas Christianity use the letter "z" in the first syllable of Nasrani. However, I want to use "s" because there is no phoneme /z/ in Malayalam. The natives of Malabar pronounce the word as Nasrani only.

12 M. Kurian Thomas, *Nasrani Samskaram Desheeyatha* (Nasrani Culture and Nationalism) (Kottayam: Malankara Orthodox Church Publications, 2013), 53–56.

13 Marthoma is the Syriac name for St. Thomas, the Apostle.

14 Malankara is a variation of the Malayalam name Maliankara, a town near Cranganore (Kodungalloor) in North Kerala, where St. Thomas is believed to have preached the gospel first.

until the Portuguese rule in Cochin, the concept of religion in its modern sense was irrelevant for the Marthoma Nasranis.[15] The following study shall indicate that this nomenclature was more of the title of a *jati* (caste) rather than that of a religious community. To understand this problematic, it is important to look at the origin of this pre-existing form of local Christianity in the context of the religio-cultural plurality of Malabar in the pre-Portuguese period.

Those who profess the Christian faith in Kerala are currently divided into three broad groupings – Marthoma Nasranis, Latin Christians, and New Christians. They are distinguished according to two main criteria: to which caste the forefathers of the members of each faction originally belonged and the date of these original conversions.[16] The Nasranis, some of whom claim descent from the Nambudiri Brahmans, the highest ranking caste in Kerala, believed to have been converted by St. Thomas, the Apostle, inadvertently and at times consciously, participated in multiple and inter-denominational schisms and alliances over many centuries. This very fact makes their history and status extremely complex within Christianity as a global religion. At present, they are scattered among various factions within the Christian community of Kerala. These include the Roman Catholic Syrians (Syro-Malabar), the Malankara Jacobite and the Orthodox, the Marthoma Syrian, Syro-Malankara Catholic, Church of South India, and various other Protestant/Pentecostal communities. In this chapter, I limit the scope of my argument to a section of the Nasranis – the Oriental Orthodox rites following Antiochian (West Syriac) liturgy and ecclesiastical traditions, namely the Malankara Syrian Orthodox and Jacobites. They have inherited the dual belongingness of the original Nasrani community and retain its culture even after their encounters with multiple forms of colonial hegemony. However, I do not wish to deny the fact that some of the aspects of dual belonging may also be justified in the case of the other factions of the Nasranis.

Christianity in Malabar has a legacy which is as ancient and rich as Christianity in the West. There have been various theories regarding the arrival of Christianity in Malabar. George Mark Moraes argues that there is a tradition in the Universal Church which considers the evangelisation of India as done by two immediate disciples of Christ – St. Thomas and St. Bartholomew. St. Thomas, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, is believed to have landed in Malabar in 52 CE, converted many "Hindus," and established seven churches. There are some legends regarding the apostolate of Bartholomew around some parts of the present Mumbai but an ancient Christian community that can testify to this argument does not exist.[17] This theory is commonly acknowledged by all denominations of the

15 Henceforth, I shall use the word Marthoma Nasranis in lieu of St. Thomas Christians in this chapter.

16 For details, see C.J. Fuller, "Kerala Christians and the Caste System," *Man, New Series*, 11, no. 1 (1976): 54.

17 George Mark Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India, from Early Times to St. Francis Xavier: A.A.52–1542* (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1964), 1–2. Although Moraes' work is one of the earliest scholarly works on the origin of Christianity in Malabar, I have not found many scholars citing from it due to shortage of its circulation and availability. However, I find Moraes' work significant as it lists a lot of sources which scholars can consult.

Marthoma Nasranis and forms the basis of the origin of Christianity in Malabar. There is a rich St. Thomas tradition in the Marthoma Nasrani community which is animated by the ancient songs, art-forms, and practices of the community. Any argument against the St. Thomas tradition is, to this time, deeply resented by the Marthoma Nasranis because it is this tradition that constitutes their historical and cultural unity.

Another theory popular among the Southists[18] faction of the Nasranis proposes that Christianity was introduced into Malabar from West Asia in the fourth/sixth century CE by Thomas of Cana, a merchant, who is popularly known among the St. Thomas Christians as Knai Thoma or Knai Thomman. The followers of Thomas of Cana constitute a minor section called the Southists who consider themselves as an exclusive community within the Christians of Malabar. It is pertinent to mention that this theory does not exclude the possibility of a Christian community in Malabar that existed prior to Thomas' arrival. Recent scholarship suggests that a good many of the Southists claim that their ancestors came to Malabar to correct the mistakes then prevalent among the existing Christians of Malabar. Anglican Church historians like C. M. Agur and L. W. Brown suggest that Christianity was introduced into Malabar by Syriac-speaking immigrants. However, this theory has another interesting aspect in its positioning of the Syrian Christians as originally immigrants to India, like the Jews of Cochin.[19]

There is a third theory which attributes the origin of Christianity in Malabar to Nestorian missionaries, who allegedly arrived there from Persia in the fifth century CE[20] (the least popular of all), endorsed by the Nestorian (Chaldean Syrian) Church located at Trichur. While it is difficult to endorse or discredit these theories, it is important to assume that the foundations of Christianity in Malabar are contemporaneous with the establishment of the church in West Asia and Asia Minor. It is widely acknowledged by historians and scholars of ancient India and Christianity in the East that little is known about the nature of the Malankara Nasrani community before the arrival of the Syriac-speaking immigrants from various parts of West Asia in the fourth century CE with their Chaldean Syriac liturgy and their ample ecclesiastical personnel. This is primarily because of the destruction of their ancient documents by fire at the Synod of Udayamperoor (Diamper)

18 The Northists (Vadakkumbhagar) and the Southists (Thekkumbhagar) were the only groups among the Nasranis before the arrival of the Portuguese. There is a story behind this division which is related to Thomas of Cana and his two wives. "One was his lawful wedded Syrian wife, the other a woman of the country. His lawful wife lived with him in the south street of Cranganore, the other woman was kept in the north street. The offspring of these families are the ancestors of the Southists and the Northists respectively." Both these groups manipulate this story for their own sociopolitical ends. For details regarding their diverse traditions and cultural specificities, see L.W. Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 174–84.

19 For details see, C J Fuller, "Kerala Christians," 54; David Goodman Mandelbaum, *Society in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 560–63.

20 Victor M. Fic, *Kerala: Yenan of India: Rise of Communist Power*, *1937–1969* (Bombay: Nachiketa, 1970), 1–2.

in 1599.[21] However, it is interesting to look at the ways in which Christianity got indigenised or acculturated in Kerala in the early days of its arrival.

The debates on the origin and evolution of Christianity in Malabar revolve around two issues – the arrival and apostolate of St. Thomas in Malabar in the first century CE and the Brahmanical lineage of the Marthoma Nasranis. Pius Malekandathil, one of the notable historians of medieval India, argues that the arrival of St. Thomas in Northwest India is now an established fact with the excavation of certain coins which bear the name of King Gondophorus whose name figures in the St. Thomas tradition mentioned in the Syriac work *Acts of Judas Thomas*.[22] After his mission in the Northwest and return to Jerusalem to attend the first Jerusalem Council, Thomas is believed to have come to Malabar via the Persian Gulf and Socotra.[23] Moreover, the existence of the Nasrani community from the second century CE, if not from 52 CE, is also asserted by both ecclesiastical and secular historians and scholars. While evidence about the arrival and apostolate of St. Thomas in Malabar are not much relevant for this chapter, the living traditions of the Nasrani community about their Brahminical origin are helpful to address my argument on dual belonging. In this context, I will briefly touch upon the question of the Brahmanical lineage of the Nasranis before I represent their negotiations with the Hindus of Malabar.

Renowned Kerala historians like M. G. S. Narayanan, Kesavan Veluthat, Rajan Gurukkal, and Pius Malekandathil have analysed this issue with reference to their research on Brahmanical settlements in South India. Narayanan, Veluthat, and Kesavan are decisive that the Nasrani claim of a Brahmanical descent is unlikely since the Brahmin settlement, according to them, happened in Kerala in the eighth century CE. Narayanan dismisses this claim due to lack of any concrete evidence. Based on circumstantial evidence, he argues that Brahmins could not have been an established community in Kerala before the seventh century. There are no epigraphic records or archaeological relics before the seventh and eighth centuries to substantiate this claim.[24] Veluthat adopts a similar perspective although he mentions that in Tamil Sangam literature, there is a solitary reference "to the northernmost, and thus possibly the oldest of these settlements, namely Chellur or Perumchellur or modern Taliparamba with a Vedic sacrificial background and the Parasu Rama tradition; but the rest of them are clearly products of a later period."[25] Gurukkal

21 The Synod of Diamper was convened by Aleixo de Menezes (1559–1617), Archbishop of Goa (1595–1612) with the sole intention to bring the Nasrani community under the domination of the Roman Catholic Church.

22 *Acts of Judas Thomas* is a third century CE Syriac work considered as apocryphal by biblical scholars.

23 Pius Malekandathil, "St. Thomas Christians: A Historical Analysis of Their Origin and Development up to 9th Century AD," in *St. Thomas Christians*, ed. Bosco Puthur (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 2.

24 M.G.S. Narayanan, "Nambudiris: Migrations and Early Settlements in Kerala," in *St. Thomas Christians*, ed. Bosco Puthur (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 88.

25 Kesavan Veluthat, "The Nambudhiri Community: A History," in *St. Thomas Christians*, ed. Bosco Puthur (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 118.

partly agrees with the aforementioned arguments but contends that there could be a few Brahmin households during this period. "There is nothing unlikely about the Apostle meeting them and discussing the gospel. However, it is anachronistic to think about conversion and establishment of churches to have happened in those days, as we understand them today."[26]

Malekandathil however takes a different perspective. Based on the Marthoma Nasrani traditions and references to wandering Brahmins and some Brahmin households in Sangam literature, he argues that one can interpret the conversion of Brahmins in the sense that some of the recipients of Thomas' gospel must have been Brahmins. In other words, Brahmin presence was perceptible in the Chera kingdom in the first century BCE and first century CE. The following observation by Malekandathil is pivotal in understanding this issue:

> In fact, Tolkapiyar, a Brahmin associated with the second Sangam (i.e., circa second century BC) had mentioned the six-fold social functions of Brahmins (evidently of Tamilnadu): viz, study of the Vedas; teaching of the Vedas; conducting Vedic sacrifices; officiating as priests in sacrifices; giving gifts to others; and receiving gifts. . . . Aryappadai Kadanda Neduncheliyan is said to have given two villages to some of these Brahmins.[27]

It is significant to note that the first three historians dismiss the claim due to their reluctance to accept that which is not written or documented as history. Regrettably, there is no reliable historical document available on the nature of the early Christian community before the arrival of the Syriac-speaking immigrants from West Asia in the eighth century CE. Malekandathil's contention and sympathetic view of the Nasrani claim are based on oral resources including fragments from Tamil Sangam poetry which mentions different occupations undertaken by wandering Brahmins. For my analysis of the dual belonging of Nasranis, I wish to subscribe to Malekandathil's method of historical analysis since the prejudice against oral history has been revisited by historians in the latter half of the twentieth century.[28] Moreover, any detail about the origin and development of the Nasrani community before the eighth century CE can be deduced only from oral traditions of the Nasranis or through the faculty of memory or collective consciousness. Therefore, I must depend upon popular views of history and religion regarding the Nasranis, which, as Susan Visvanathan argues, "provide glimpses and insights which would otherwise be lost in the objective accounts of historians and theologians."[29]

26 Rajan Gurukkal, "St. Thomas Christians and Nambudhiri Brahmins: A Note," in *St. Thomas Christians*, ed. Bosco Puthur (Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003), 110.

27 Malekandathil, "St. Thomas Christians," 10–12.

28 For details about the theory of oral history and its methodological tools, see Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010).

29 Susan Visvanathan, *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba* (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1993), xiii.

The living traditions of the Nasranis hold that the Apostle landed at Kodungalloor in around 52 CE and converted some high-caste Brahmanical families which include Pakalomattom, Sankarapuri, Kalli, Kalikavu, Koykkam, Madeipur, Muttodal, Nedumpally, Panackamattom, and Kottakal families among many others at Kodungalloor, Palayur (Palur), Parur (Kottakavil), Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Nilakkal (Chayal), and Quilon (Kollam). These traditions were primarily oral in nature, transmitted across generations. It is helpful in this context to refer to some of the prevailing Christian poetic forms which describe the life of the early Christian community. This repertoire of songs, hymns, and performances are significant because they are strongly associated with the Nasrani identity. In this sense, they are not only sources which lead us to the historical configurations that the Nasranis have encountered, but they also reflect unique patterns of understanding particularly at times when the Nasrani community has faced crises in their existence. Their written versions are of post-sixteenth-century origin and are found in a few songs such as *Margam Kali Pattu*, *Ramban Pattu*, *Veeradiyan Pattu*.[30]

P. J. Thomas makes an interesting study of these ancient songs which represent the central themes of the mission of St. Thomas in Malabar and the dual belonging of the Nasranis with respect to their Brahmanical lineage. *Margamkali* is a genre of lyrical dance resembling the *Yatrakali* or *Sastrakali*[31] of the Nambudiris, performed among the Nasranis during the time of marriage and other auspicious occasions. Some historians attribute the authorship to a Nasrani priest named Vettikkunnel Ittithomman Kattanar who lived between 1600 and 1700 CE, but this is doubtful. *Ramban Pattu* is another literary form ascribed to one Maliekkal Thoma Ramban who is believed to have been baptised by the Apostle in the first century CE. It also refers to the fact that it was modified and rewritten in its modern form by another Ramban who was in the 48th generation of Thoma Ramban. *Veeradiyan Pattu* or *Paanan Varavu* (the terms denote a specific lower caste in Kerala) is another important art form performed on the eve of a Nasrani marriage. At the wedding banquet, a representative of the *Paanan* caste comes forward and narrates the ancient, time-honoured history of the Nasranis right from the arrival of St. Thomas, the Apostle. The description contains the social status enjoyed by the Nasranis during the reign of Cheraman Perumals, the rulers of Malabar. There are also *Palli Pattukal* (Church songs) which describe the history of ancient churches like Kaduthuruthi, Kottayam Valiya Palli, Muthalakkodam, Mayilakkombu, Aarakkuzha, and Marutholil. It is difficult to trace the dates of their origin or authorship. Other traditional songs related to the early history of

30 Paul Thenayan, *The Missionary Consciousness of the St. Thomas Christians* (Cochin: Viani Publications, 1982), 7–8.

31 *Yatrakali* is a performance relating to weapons. This is a unique amusement kept by a section of Nambudhiris who are believed to represent the Brahmanical army of Parasu Rama. The performance seems to combine the propitiation of Śiva and Parvati with exorcism and skilled swordsmanship. For further details, see Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari, *Castes and Tribes of Southern India* (New Delhi: AES, 2001), 229–33.

the Nasranis are *Abraham Metranthe Pattu* (The Song of Mar Abraham, written presumably in the sixteenth/seventeenth century), *Yakkovinthe Vattakkali* (Round Dance), *Adathinthe Vattakkali* (The Round Dance of Adam), *Poorva Yousephinthe Vattakkali* (The Round Dance of Joseph, the Forefather), *Mooshayude Vattakali* (The Round Dance of Moses), *Tobiasinthe Pattu* (The Song of Tobias), and *Younan Niviyayude Pattu* (The Song of Prophet Jonah).[32] It is interesting to note that all these songs refer to the Nasrani community as a *margam* (path/way of life) just like the Buddhist or the Jain *margams* and not as a religion.

Another source which explores the Brahmanical lineage and the idea of dual belonging is a collection of family histories written among Marthoma Nasranis in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Like many other communities in Kerala, oral transmission of lineage prevailed among the Malankara Nasranis. We do not have an available archive on written family histories prior to the eighteenth century though there exists some *thaliyola grandhankal*[33] written on ancient Christian families like Pakalomattom and Shankarapuri. K. George Varghese argues that the family histories produced among the Malankara Nasranis in the nineteenth century had a quality of scientific historiography. "While some are works of high scholarship and historical accuracy, most appear to be heraldic manifestos intended to establish the putative superiority of the family."[34] Writing family histories is therefore a way in which the Nasranis gave expression to their historical consciousness. A thorough analysis of these popular reconstructions of family histories may enable us to understand the nature of the early Christian community in Malabar as it exists in the collective consciousness of the Nasranis. At the same time, one should also be conscious that

> narratives of this kind reveal what people highlight about themselves, what they forget, what they choose to remember about others or about themselves. Each narrative, then, is to be seen as a symbolic system which represents the self or the other in a particular mode and must not be judged according to the categories of truth and falsity as commonly understood.[35]

Family histories reconstructed in the nineteenth century are also subjective in character. Most of them trace their origin to Nambudiri-Brahmins or Nairs

32 P.J. Thomas, *Malayala Sahithyavum Kristhiyanikalum [Malayalam Literature and Christians]* (Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1961), 57–68.

33 This means inscriptions on palm leaves. This was a common mode of writing in ancient Kerala.

34 "A large number of family histories (*kudumbacharitram*) are being written among the Syrian Christians of Kerala, notable for their imaginary and tropological peculiarities. An informal estimate puts their count at around 1,000. An attempt in collecting them by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR), Thiruvananthapuram, recently has resulted in a stockpile of around 200. This could perhaps be the biggest historical archive of a single community anywhere in the world." K. George Varghese, "Writing Family Histories: Identity Construction among Syrian Christians," *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 9 (2004): 897, accessed November 4, 2010, www.jstor.org/stable/4414699.

35 Visvanathan, *Christians of Kerala*, 78.

and represent their family as converted by St. Thomas, the Apostle in the first century CE. Susan Visvanathan identifies a certain pattern in a few of these narratives which she gathered from a small town in Kerala called Puthenangadi. Most of them contain a reference to the family's earlier affluence and the high position the family members enjoyed in a plural society, the majority of which are Hindus. One example for this is the privilege of having *Veeralipattu* (a kind of silk) worn by Nasrani men at their weddings. It was silk which was given to the gods in the temple. Another important feature of these narratives is that they tend to highlight their relationship with the local rulers or the royal families so that they can ascertain their prestige. It is also important in this context to note that many Nasrani men from olden times were warriors and they constituted a powerful section of the king's army.[36] These features point to the fact that the Nasranis from the very outset enjoyed a privileged status both in the Hindu courts and in the society at large and they considered their "Hindu" lineage as a matter of pride.

The question of the Brahmanical lineage of the Nasranis is therefore important to understand their negotiation with the "Hindus" in Kerala. After the consolidation of the Brahmanical system in the eight century CE, the Nasranis were adopted as an intermediary caste with special privileges. The relationship of the Malankara Nasranis with the Persian Church from the eight century CE earned them the benefit of having a rich liturgy and theology – the East Syrian or the Chaldean liturgy and its theology. It is this liturgy which gave them a new identity – the Syrian Christians. Interestingly, this liturgy or theology did not pose any kind of threat to age-old local indigenous customs and traditions (which were later called Hindu by the Portuguese and other imperial players in Malabar). Nor did it put the practice of caste into critical question. The Nasrani community with its new liturgy was able to maintain *status quo* regarding their sociopolitical status. The following is an account given by K. George Varghese about the Malankara Nasrani community's social status in Kerala after their association with the Syriac-speaking West Asians and the consolidation of Brahmanical power:

> the deeds awarded to these communities by the rulers of Kerala . . . privileged them with important sumptuary and trading rights . . . These charters of 72 special rights, given on copper plates, became the "Magna Carta" of the Kerala Christians. They also made the explicit recognition of their social status par with upper caste Hindus. The Syrian Christians eventually became an intermediary caste group between the Brahmins and the lower castes. This had decisive social functions in the early social system of Kerala, ordered according to the principles of pollution and purity.[37]

36 Ibid., 77–80.

37 Varghese, "Writing Family Histories," 898.

This means that the rigidity of the Brahmanical system facilitated the exclusivity of the Nasrani community within the larger social system. Similarly, in due course, the Nasrani claim about their Brahmanical lineage got stabilised by their assimilation and practice of many of the Brahmanical rites and rituals. While the ecclesiastical dimension of their life was centred on the Syriac liturgy and traditions brought into their community by the visiting Persian bishops, the domestic dimension of their life was predicated on the Brahmanical system predominant in the society. Like the Brahmins, they followed pollution rituals, familial status, and nobility of birth. Like the Nairs (a warrior caste in Kerala), Nasranis were trained warriors. Many of them served in the standing army of the Rajas and local rulers. L. K. Anantakrishna Ayyar in his book *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians* looks at the subtle negotiations between the Nasranis and the "Hindus" of Kerala. He observes that the Nasranis and the caste Hindus shared a common social space until the arrival of the colonial powers in Malabar:

> The Syrian Christians of Kerala were numbered among the noble races of Malabar. "They were preferred to the Nayars, and enjoyed the privilege of being called by no other name than that of the Sons of King. . . . The Christians of Kerala were directly under the King and were not subjects to local chiefs. The Syrian Christians never saluted anyone below their own rank because it was dishonorable to his own status. The Nayars who were of the military clan regarded them superior and loved them exceedingly. . . . They were loving, faithful and diligent. They respected the Christians before whom they never venture to sit unless invited to do so. They were very strong and powerful and their Bishops were respected and feared like Kings. To erect a playhouse (frascati) was the privilege of the Brahmins and the same privilege was given to the Christians also. They were given seats by the side of the Kings and their chief officers. . . . The Syrian Christians were also almost on par with their sovereigns. They were allowed to have a military force of their own, which was composed chiefly of Shanars, the caste that cultivated the palm tree. Beside the Brahmins, they were the only inhabitants of the country who were permitted to have enclosures in front of their houses.[38]

The traditional architectural styles of the Nasranis also capture the dual belonging of the community. Ayyar continues his admiration of the blend of Hindu and Christian cultures even in the day-to-day aspects of Nasrani life:

> In the selection of sites for houses and about the details of the structure the Syrian Christians conformed to a certain extent to the Hindu style of architecture. . . . The Hindu carpenters (Assaris) who were mostly engaged in the

38 L.K. Anantakrishna Ayyar, *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians* (Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1926), 54–55.

> construction of houses follow the Hindu Sastras on the subject and no objection is made by their Christian Masters. . . . The houses of Syrian Christians are constructed in various fashions like those of the Nayars, and are mostly situated in garden abounding in cocoanut and other fruit bearing trees.[39]

Ayyar's observation about the discouragement of priestly celibacy in the Nasrani community is also interesting as it is, in his view, derived from a combination of Vedic Hindu and Oriental Christian worldviews:

> Among the Aryans and other nations of the world celibacy has been condemned for many reasons. . . . It appears to be unnatural, and it is taken as an indication of licentious habit. . . . Where ancestors are worshiped after their death, it inspires a religious honour – the man who lives himself without offspring shows reckless indifference to the religion of his people, to his own fate after death and to the duties he owes to the dead whose spirits depend upon the offspring of their descendant for their comfort. The man without a son cannot enter paradise because there is nobody to pay him the family worship. Further, the conviction that the founding of house and begetting children constituted a moral duty, had a deep hold upon people in ancient times. Hence celibacy has been regarded as an act of impiety and a misfortune. . . . The same Hindu custom prevails among the members of the Syrian Christian community also. . . . The influence of Christianity had at the outset no degrading influence of any kind, for the ascetic ideal was not yet predominant, and the priest married as a matter of course. There was then no difficulty in accepting the marriage order established in the secular world.[40]

In this context, it is also significant to mention some of the upper-caste Brahmanical ritualistic practices that the Nasranis upheld. The Nasrani traditions related to birth, death, marriage, etc., were almost the same as that of the caste Hindus. Like the latter, they had customs like *Pillayoottu* (feeding of small children at the temple as part of a ritual), *Thalikettu* (fastening of the *Mangalyasutra* or the wedding locket around the neck of the bride by the bridegroom), and *Pulakuli* (ritual bath after someone's death). They also practised untouchability. The lower castes were forbidden to enter the Nasrani households. If any lower caste entered the Nasrani kitchen, it was inevitable that they would sprinkle *punyaham* (holy water) to remove the pollution. The concept of pollution was followed so rigorously that when the Portuguese Archbishop Aleixo de Menezes visited some churches in Malabar, the majority of the priests hesitated to shake hands with him for the fear that they would be polluted by his touch.[41] We do not have any record which

39 Ibid., 58.
40 Ibid., 62–66.
41 Thomas, *Malayala,* 21–23.

asserts that the visiting Persian prelates opposed practices of caste or black magic. Interestingly, C. M. Agur mentions one popular narrative in which a Syrian prelate teaches witchcraft to a native priest:

> It is said that some of the foreign Christians who came to this coast were well conversant with the art of necromancy, mesmerism, clairvoyance and others of the black art, and as such they are also said to have leagued with evil spirits. These foreigners imparted this knowledge of witchcraft to their admiring brethren thereby fascinating them and one of the former named Mar Danagah[42] taught this black art to a priest in the Cadamattam family and both of them continued in the practice of it. While so, Mar Danagah died, and his disciple preserved the bones of his master and adorned with them the wall near the altar of the church and commenced worshipping Mar Danagah as a saint, performing ceremonies and adorations before his relics. Like the sorcerers and magicians of Egypt who with their enchantments performed miracles, and like the Hindus of old among whom witchcraft was a common art, this man also performed seemingly miraculous deeds by his devotion to departed spirits, and people were greatly afraid to oppose him, as by the help of devil . . . he is said to have somehow or other brought down affliction on all his enemies.[43]

Agur's version of this narrative is slightly prejudiced and different from its popular representations among the Nasranis. The version of the story that I have heard from some followers of the Malankara Syrian Orthodox and Jacobite faith represents Kadamattathu Kattanar as having acquired the art of witchcraft either from the *Kattalans* (some aboriginal groups living in forests) or from the Devil himself. He is believed to have used those powers for the good of humanity rather than bringing afflictions on his enemies. For this reason, the Nasranis venerate him as a saintly personage and pay homage to him in the Kadamattam Church. Whatever be the truth value of this narrative, it is one among the many instances in which one can argue that the Oriental theology followed by the Persian prelates was in no way polemical or unsympathetic towards those indigenous Nasrani practices, be it Christian or Hindu.

To conclude, the Marthoma Nasranis did not have a concept of mission that was oriented towards converting people from other castes. Nasrani in the pre-Portuguese times appears to be a *jati* which claimed descent from one of the upper castes in the Brahminical social system. Like the other indigenous practices of worship in Malabar, the Nasrani existence was thought to be another *margam* which aimed at the realisation of the ultimate truth. This perspective of looking at it as another *margam* is that which brought the Nasranis closer to the Hindus in

42 Mar Danagah whom Agur refers to is Mar Danaha in other sources.

43 C.M. Agur, *The Church History of Travancore* (New Delhi: AES, 1990), 36–37.

Kerala. With respect to the idea of Nasrani dual belonging, one may have to agree with Robert Eric Frykenberg's thesis about the Nasranis:

> From the outset, these seem to have been, for the most part, an aristocratic and indigenous elite. Hindu in culture, Christian in faith, and Persian or Syrian (Orthodox) in doctrine, ecclesiology, and ritual, these Christians, at least some of whom were a compact Jewish Christian community, gradually evolved into what constituted a complex of high-caste communities whose occupational position, ritual purity, and social ranking, as merchant traders and merchant warriors – sometimes even as local rulers – became ever more firmly fixed and well grounded.[44]

However, I do not think that Nasranis despite their consciousness of inhabiting both Christian and Hindu spaces should be subsumed under the Hindutva definition of Hinduism as the essential religion of India. There have been recent attempts by both Nasrani and Pro-Hindutva groups to appropriate Nasrani practices into the Hindu fold. One should look at Nasrani dual belonging in a different light since the Nasrani community with its continuous history of around 15 centuries was the first in Kerala to have emerged into religious consciousness following its encounter with the Portuguese. E. M. Philip, in his book on the history of the Malankara Nasranis, makes a critical observation about the survival of Nasrani traditions until the twentieth century CE. He points out that given the absence of affiliation with any powerful Christian community elsewhere, the small Christian community in Malabar would have either merged with other indigenous (Hindu) forms of worship or experienced a series of persecutions and gone into the annals of history. It is a matter of debate whether the benevolence of the Brahmins/the Nairs or the Nair kings or the inflexible caste ridden Brahminical sociopolitical system facilitated the survival of this community. This is a curious case since the Christian community which is believed to have existed on the western coast of India in the first century did not survive despite having a similar if not a more rigid Hindu system.[45] Therefore, the Nasrani claim of the Brahminical descent and their notion of dual belonging need not be interpreted only in terms of endorsing the upper-caste status of the Nasranis in our own times. Nor does it merely contribute to the pro-Hindutva perspective on treating the Nasrani community as originally Hindu despite the sympathies of a group of Nasranis with the BJP and the RSS. I would rather conclude that the Nasrani community survived and established itself as a major political force in Kerala through history due to its ability to adopt a strategy which negotiated dual belonging by means of a curious combination of adaptation and exclusivity.

44 Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112.

45 E.M. Philip, *Mor Thoma Sleehayude Indian Sabha [The Indian Church of St. Thomas, the Apostle]* (Mulanthuruthy: Seminary Publications, 2005), 1–2. See also fn. 17 in this chapter about the supposed apostolate of Bartholomew around some parts of present-day Mumbai.

References

Abrams, Lynn. *Oral History Theory*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Agur, C.M. *The Church History of Travancore*. New Delhi: AES, 1903, 1990. Print.

Aiya, V. Nagam. *The Travancore State Manual*. Trivandrum: Travancore Government Press, 1906.

Ayyar, L.K. Anantakrishna. *Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*. Ernakulam: Cochin Government Press, 1926.

Brown, L.W. *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas: An Account of the Ancient Syrian Church of Malabar*. Cambridge (Britain): Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Dempsey, Corinne G. *Kerala Christian Sainthood: Collisions of Culture and Worldview in South India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Fic, Victor M. *Kerala: Yenan of India: Rise of Communist Power, 1937–1969*. Bombay: Nachiketa, 1970.

Francis Buchanan. *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara, and Malabar, Performed Under the Orders of the Most Noble the Marquis Wellesley, Governor General of India, for the Express Purpose of Investigating the State of Agriculture, Arts, and Commerce . . . in the Dominions of the Rajah of Mysore, and the Countries Acquired by the Honorable East India Company*. London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1807.

Frykenberg, Robert Eric. *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Fuller, C.J. "Kerala Christians and the Caste System." *Man, New Series* 11, no. 1 (1976): 53–70. Accessed February 27, 2021. https://doi.org/10.2307/2800388.

Galletti, A., A.J. Van Der Burg, and P. Groot. *The Dutch in Malabar: Being a Translation of Selections Nos. 1 and 2 with Introduction and Notes*. Madras: Superintendent, Government Press, 1911.

Gurukkal, Rajan. "St. Thomas Christians and Nambudhiri Brahmins: A Note." In *St. Thomas Christians*, edited by Bosco Puthur, 108–16. Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003.

Malekandathil, Pius. "St. Thomas Christians: A Historical Analysis of Their Origin and Development up to 9th Century AD." In *St. Thomas Christians*, edited by Bosco Puthur, 1–48. Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003.

Mandelbaum, D.G. *Society in India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970.

Moraes, George Mark. *A History of Christianity in India from Early Times to St. Francis Xavier: A.A.52–1542*. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1964.

Narayanan, M.G.S. "Nambudhiris: Migrations and Early Settlements in Kerala." In *St. Thomas Christians*, edited by Bosco Puthur, 80–97. Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003.

Philip, E.M. *Mor Thoma Sleehayude Indian Sabha [The Indian Church of St. Thomas, the Apostle]*. Mulanthuruthy: Seminary Publications, 1992, 2005.

Puthur, Bosco. *St. Thomas Christians, and Nambudiris, Jews, and Sangam Literature: A Historical Appraisal*. Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003.

Sontheimer, Gunter D., and Hermann Kulke. *Introduction. Hinduism Reconsidered*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1991.

Thapar, Romila. "Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity." *Modern Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (1998): 209–31. JSTOR. Accessed August 20, 2017.

Thenayan, Paul. *The Missionary Consciousness of the St. Thomas Christians*. Cochin: Viani Publications, 1982.

Thomas, Kurian M. *Nasrani Samskaram Desheeyatha [Nasrani Culture and Nationalism]*. Kottayam: The Malankara Orthodox Church Publications, 2013.

Thomas, P.J. *Malayala Sahithyavum Kristhiyanikalum [Malayalam Literature and Christians]*. Kottayam: National Book Stall, 1935, 1961.

Thurston, Edgar, and K. Rangachari. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*. New Delhi: AES, 1909, 2001.

Varghese, K. George. "Writing Family Histories: Identity Construction among Syrian Christians." *Economic and Political Weekly* 39, no. 9 (2004): 897–900. Accessed November 4, 2010. www.jstor.org/stable/4414699.

Veluthat, Kesavan. "The Nambudhiri Community: A History." In *St. Thomas Christians*, edited by Bosco Puthur, 117–25. Kochi: LRC Publications, 2003.

Visvanathan, Susan. *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual among the Yakoba*. Madras: Oxford University Press, 1993.

3 *Neither myself nor another* – the interreligious belonging of Raimon Panikkar

Michael Barnes SJ

No doubt there is a range of meanings to "dual belonging," from being affectively "at home" in more than one religious tradition to something more akin to bilingual competence, a learnt capacity to express oneself in different religious idioms. Each version presents its conceptual problems. There is also, however, what may be called a mystical meaning, a profound sense that the Divine Mystery, however it may be described, can never be confined within religious or denominational borders. Far from obliterating borders, such a conviction takes them with utter seriousness, yet also acknowledges an invitation to explore further, to exercise the imagination in listening for echoes of one religious tradition being sounded in the thought-forms of another. One such border-crossing mystic is the subject of this chapter: Raimon Panikkar who spent most of his life exploring the tantalising edge that separated the Hinduism of his Indian father from the Catholicism of his Spanish mother. Towards the end of his life, as he feels "death circling" around him, he writes in his diary about the regrets that oppress him. In Augustinian vein, he addresses the God whose name he has abused.

> You are not an *Aliud* but rather an *Alter* – the other part of myself. But I do not know how to express this. . . . I have not mentioned you by your name, Jesus Christ. I love you, you who are neither myself nor another. I would like to say goodbye to all those whom I have loved passionately – because love is a passion.[1]

I have chosen that phrase "neither myself nor another" as the title of this chapter because it expresses so succinctly the great preoccupation that runs through all of Panikkar's work, the self between worlds. He often refers to a saying attributed to Heidegger: "you can never jump over your own shadow."[2] Life is never a matter

1 Raimon Panikkar, *The Water of the Drop,* ed. Milena Carrara Pavan (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2018), 288–89.

2 For example, in *The Rhythm of Being* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 303; *Humanism and Cross,* in *Opera Omnia,* Vol. III.1, 88; "Are there Anonymous Religions?" in *Opera Omnia. The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man*, Vol. II.1, 222 (New York and London: Orbis, 1973).

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-3

of finished achievement but of negotiating a way through a world of plurality, difference, incompletion, and loss – in which one is already implicated. Paradoxically, for Panikkar, it is in the embrace and acceptance of difference – perhaps better, being embraced *by* difference – one learns how to find that elusive One in the Many. That paradox is not limited to Panikkar, of course; one finds versions of it running through the entire history of philosophy and religion, East and West. I begin here, however, because I find in his experience of dual belonging an illuminating example of the philosophical tensions and existential struggles that any border-crosser must contemplate.

An ambiguous figure

In the last few years, Panikkar has been the subject of a number of studies.[3] Yet, for all the obligatory words of appreciation, he cuts an ambiguous, even controversial, stance, not least in the area of Hindu-Christian relations where he remains something of a maverick. In his Teape lectures, Francis Clooney writes about a number of Christian theologians who have engaged deeply with the Hindu religious world, and some of them are producing remarkable accounts of a Christian faith transformed by a dialogue with classical Hinduism, and various Hindu intellectuals who have contributed to the dialogue with their attempts to reclaim the best of the Hindu commentarial tradition.[4] Yet Clooney does not mention Panikkar. Admittedly, this is a brief survey and Clooney is interested in mapping out possible future trajectories. But the omission raises some serious questions.

There is no doubt Panikkar is a seminal thinker within the range of disciplines that make up theology of religions. According to Anselm Min, he acts as an articulate apologist for an "ontological pluralism" that is realised not at the conceptual level of ideology but at the aesthetic level of symbol and myth.[5] Being and thought are deeply bound up together but being always transcends thought for the very nature of being is freedom and creative spontaneity. Panikkar's insistence on

3 For example, Joseph Prabhu, ed., *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996); Kala Acharya and Milena Carrara Pavan, eds., *Raimon Panikkar: His Legacy and Vision* (Somaiya Publications, 2008). Roberta Cappellini, Giuseppe Cognetti, and Anna Maria Natalini, eds., "Symposium on the Dialogical Dialogue and Raimon Panikkar," *CIRPIT Review* 5 (2014); Erik Ranstrom and Bob Robinson, *"Without Ceasing to be a Christian": A Catholic and Protestant Assess the Christological Contribution of Raimon Panikkar* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017). Peter Phan and Young-chan Ro, eds., *Raimon Panikkar: A Companion to his Life and Thought* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2018).

4 Francis X. Clooney, *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).

5 Anselm Min, "Loving without Understanding: Raimon Panikkar's Ontological Pluralism," *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 68 (2010): 59–75. In many ways this sophisticated and intense philosophical critique of Panikkar's peculiar take on religious diversity parallels and reiterates a similar critique, from a theological perspective, offered by Rowan Williams, "Trinity and Pluralism," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 3–15.

an ultimate reality that resists any homogenising act of reason is not to be lightly dismissed.

And yet, his finely wrought philosophical argument, spiced with obscure neologisms, often gets caught into an ever-exuberant rhetoric. His well-known claim that "I 'left' as a Christian, I 'found' myself a Hindu and I 'return' a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian,"[6] seems all too redolent of a playful postmodern eclecticism. Is his voluminous writing, for all its breadth of interest and vitality of treatment, too much a creature of its time – too focused on the classical patterns of a Sanskritic Hinduism and displaying little interest in the contemporary vernacular traditions?[7] Does his relative lack of attention to the broader currents of Christian theological reflection make him too idiosyncratic a guide through the toxic religious excesses of the sober twenty-first century? If that is the case, should we be content to extend a gracious nod of appreciation to a unique scholar of undoubted genius and move on to more fruitful examples of dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity?

Biography and spirituality

I am reluctant to do that. At a personal level, I have reason to be grateful for his inspiration. I met him only twice. Once at a conference in India he engaged in "dialogue" with Huston Smith; my memory is that he hardly stopped talking for the entire hour, his partner meekly sitting there as all questions and queries were bulldozed before him. A few years later at Heythrop College, he gave a set-piece lecture. He arrived early and sat quietly in my office gathering his thoughts. There I saw another side of his character: if not a mystic, then a natural contemplative, needing to withdraw for a while if he was to husband his energies. Although he was the consummate professional, a rigorous academic, and a captivating speaker, he was less interested in pursuing the fame his career brought him than exploring the passion that drove him.

The framework that Panikkar and his devoted editor, Milena Pavan, envisaged for his collected works, the *Opera Omnia*, was governed by spirituality – a term which has important connotations for him. He took delight in producing dense introductions to each volume that mapped out his own personal journey of faith. At times, however, the scheme conceived for the whole collection feels a little artificial, as if rich and complex *bhāṣyas* have been reduced to a set of gnomic *sūtras*. For Panikkar writing was itself a religious exercise, a practice of faith that did not just record but advanced his spiritual journey. This suggests that the way to read Panikkar is not to treat his writing as a map for the rest of us poor mortals

6 Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist, 1978), 2.

7 Volume IV.2 of the *Opera Omnia*, devoted to Hinduism, contains a hitherto unpublished essay which touches on the phenomenon of *dalit* and *Adivasi* religion: "Indra's Cunning – the Challenge of Modernity: the Indic Experiment," 273–375. Unsurprisingly, Panikkar does not mention politicised *Hindutva* nationalism, the identity politics that backs the rise of the BJP.

to follow but to listen for the voice of a visionary wisdom teacher caught up in the inner movements of the Spirit.

That is why in this chapter, I make a virtue of necessity by concentrating only on two texts with which I have had something of a love–hate relationship over the years. The first is his intriguing little book on the Trinity which at times reads more like points for meditation than a theological treatise.[8] What he proposes is a hypothesis which acts not as a spiritual refuge or speculative account of the depths of reality but as an invitation to enter into a "cosmotheandric mystery" which in the very middle of all the distinctions and differences that pervade human living grants an intrinsically non-dualistic vision of the point, so difficult to describe, where God and humanity meet.

I find something compelling in this little book, not because of its undoubted value as a case study in critical comparison but because it catches a moment in time and space – the early 60s in a small hut in the Himalayas where its author sat, and meditated, and wrote. Ideally, as Panikkar admits, what he says in one single outpouring of creativity needs the expanse of a 500-page monograph. But not even the more polished exactness of the published version of his Gifford lectures comes close to catching the freshness of pages dedicated to nothing less than the "universalisation of Christianity."[9] If that sounds dangerously imperialistic, one senses a Panikkarian shrug of the shoulders as he says "it is necessary to start somewhere"; maybe it is Christianity's lot to undergo a "purifying transformation" for the sake of an opening to others.[10]

At the other extreme from that tiny *Trinity* book is another of my favourite Panikkar texts, *The Vedic Experience*. This massive work, some 900 pages in the original edition, and more than ten long years of collaborative work in its production, includes texts from all four *Vedas* as well as the *Brāhmaṇas, Upaniṣads, Śrauta Sūtras*, and the *Bhagavad Gītā*.[11] It began as a contribution to the movement of inculturation of the liturgy into vernacular forms that originated with the reforms of Vatican II. Like *Trinity*, it breathes the heady air of Christian ashrams and the advaitic spirituality associated with the likes of Jules Monchanin, Abhishiktananda, and Bede Griffiths.

I have found this anthology invaluable as a single volume collection of Indian wisdom, a brilliant resource for the interreligious *lectio divina* I used to do for my pastoral work in interreligious relations in Southall, West London. The

8 This first appeared as "Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (1968): 507–34; and subsequently as *The Trinity and World Religions* (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970); and as *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (New York: Orbis; London: DLT, 1973).

9 *Trinity*, 5.

10 Ibid., 6.

11 *The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration*, edited and translated with introductions and notes by Raimundo Panikkar with the collaboration of N. Shanta, M.A.R. Rogers, B. Bäumer, and M. Bidoli (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978). Republished as Volume IV.1 of the *Opera Omnia*, 2016.

introductions, commentaries, and notes are set out with a lightness of touch yet attention to detail that subtly shapes the reader's curiosity without taking away from the majesty of the text itself. It's a remarkable achievement, an evocation of the Hindu symbolic world, allowing the imagery to unfold on its own terms. Not for nothing does it bear the subtitle *Mantramañjari* – a garland of verses. The form of presentation is quite different from anything suggested by the arrangement of the classical texts themselves, being set around more existential patterns of initiation and liminality, from themes of Dawn and Birth, Germination and Growth, to Death and Dissolution and the promise of New Life and Freedom. While the *Trinity* book reads like an allusive contribution to the "Dialogue of Theological Exchange," the Vedic collection is more obviously a carefully constructed manual for the "Dialogue of Religious Experience."[12] With Panikkar, however, such distinctions never quite work.

Religious experience and theological exchange

Panikkar opens *Trinity* provocatively by shifting attention away from the engagement of discrete "religions" to three underlying spiritualities – ritual, devotion, and mysticism – which he claims are intrinsically cross-religious. Any given spirituality, he says, is "one typical way of handling the human condition. . . . [I]t represents man's basic attitude vis-à-vis his ultimate end."[13] In the first section of the book, he outlines three such attitudes and the practices to which they give rise. These are named in the subtitle of the book: icon, person, and mystery. In the last section, they are called explicitly the spirituality of the Father, the spirituality of the Son, and the spirituality of the Spirit. Panikkar's intention is clear. Through a holistic synthesis of complementary spiritual "attitudes," he wants to show how a Trinitarian structure pervades the whole of reality: a generative source from which arises both intelligible structure of form and the dynamic flux of active-contemplative life.

Meanwhile, when we turn to *The Vedic Experience*, we find ourselves confronted not by grand universalising concepts but by a vast anthology of Brahmanical wisdom. There is a strength – and a weakness – here. In the introduction to her own anthology from the Ṛig Veda, Wendy Doniger says that, of various English translations, "only Panikkar could be called readable, and his is a strongly slanted selection and rendition."[14] While the translations are often beautifully phrased, at times a limited selection of verses seems to operate as a vehicle for Panikkar's own expansive meditations. He is much more of an insider than most non-Hindu readers of the Vedic tradition and too subtle a thinker to indulge in crass comparative generalisations, but he does not presume to play the neutral observer. As in

12 The fourfold distinction of dialogues of theological exchange, religious experience, common action, and common life originates with the Federation of Asian Bishops' conferences and has found its way into a number of Roman Catholic magisterial documents, not least Pope John Paul II's highly influential *Redemptoris Missio*.

13 *Trinity*, vii.

14 Wendy Doniger, *The Rig Veda* (London: Penguin, 1981), 12.

Trinity, he expects to find in great religious literature complementary, if not compatible, patternings of human growth and transformation. Yet, he is also aware that the restless desire to know and occupy this world can end up doing violence to the very world it sets out to order. We have already touched on that point and we shall return to it later.

Though very different in style and form, my two works are examples of Panikkar's "imparative" method, an intense engaged learning that Clooney calls "mutual inhabitation."[15] Underlying both is a conceptual scheme, the one coming from Hinduism – stated explicitly as the *trimarga* of *Karma, Bhakti* and *Jñāna yogas* – and the other much more implicit and deeply hidden, from within the Judaeo-Christian Mystery of a dialogical call and response. These are starting points, structuring devices that invite the reader to share not a back-and-forth exercise in comparison but a journey with the wise of both traditions into the mystery of otherness. Panikkar is commending a practice that is both spiritual and theological, rooted in the liturgy, prayer, and culture of Hinduism yet informed by respect for the inner coherence of tradition. One seeks to bring one's own "language of faith" into an intense dialogue with the world of the other. The "dialogue of theological exchange" will emphasise the cognitive element; the "dialogue of religious experience" the more affective.

The distinction, however, can be a little artificial. Theology always involves a contemplative and critical attention to the inner and outer life of a community of persons who are held together by the normativity of tradition. The interreligious question – implicit in Panikkar's experience of the "between" – is not so much how the theologian brings into a single focus the inner and outer dimensions of the community's life and practice (for the theologian will always be doing that) but how much that normativity can or should be enhanced by the encounter with other textually inscribed worlds, what is strictly exterior to tradition yet considered normative by other faith communities.

That question is complex not just because it raises issues about the limits of accommodation or adaptation in the search for mutual understanding but because the significance given to classical texts varies so much from community to community and indeed within communities. The four *Vedas* may be considered *śruti* in all Hindu traditions but only in more rationalising reformist sects such as the Arya Samaj do they have a formal presence in worship and daily practice. As Panikkar says, "It is simply an exaggeration to say that Hinduism and Indian philosophy are directly nurtured by the Vedas and are a continuation of the Vedic spirit. In hardly any other culture in the world has the fountainhead been paid more lip-service but received less real attention."[16]

Something similar could be said for the way in which the Old Testament is treated with a sub-Marcionite disdain in some Christian churches – canonical in theory but a disparate collection of remote typologies in practice. And yet, just as

15 Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 48.

16 *Vedic Experience*, 14.

Vatican II's "return to the sources" has brought in its wake a revival of interest in the scriptural world that continues to nourish the living tradition of Judaism, so there is evidence of a renewed interest in the ritual practices inscribed in the Vedic tradition.[17] If Panikkar has achieved nothing else, he has made a measure of Vedic wisdom accessible to a wider interreligious audience. "Imparative" is more idiosyncratic than Clooney's "comparative"; if the latter takes place in the "between" created by two texts and their commentarial traditions, the former is more to do with the risky immediacy of personal context, with what happens in the heart of the knowing subject and in the transformation that encounter with the other effects.

This takes us back to my initial reservation about the looseness of Panikkar's Christian theological credentials. While talk of "Christianness" and the "Christic principle" as expressions of a personal orientation have their own plausibility in a world of shifting religious identities, it is often unclear how such constructs are related to the mainstream of the Christian community of faith, let alone to the historical narrative which gives Christianity its particular shape.[18] The responsibility the theologian owes to the accumulated wisdom of the "home" community, however much it may be honed by lively exercises in learning from and with the other, cannot be sidelined in favour of the personally appropriated wisdom of the individual, however erudite. That is not to belittle Panikkar's example and experience, if only because an ever-maturing interiority, a capacity to "see inside" another world, is essential to all interreligious engagement.

The question is not whether virtues of humility and hospitality are necessary but *how* they are to be learnt and practised. In any particular context, the tension between "religious experience" and "theological exchange" is subtle and demanding – and Panikkar, for all his tendency to dwell on edges rather than in a settled "home," has a role to play. Before opening up the questions my two texts address in more detail, let me turn back to that entry in his diary, to ask how the God he hardly dares name is not *Aliud* but *Alter*, not the object of a gnosis he can control but the "other part of myself" that can be revealed only in an act of self-sacrificing love.

The integrity of human living: Word and Spirit

A provocative reflection about the integrity of human living in a multireligious world comes from Panikkar's use of a beguiling little story from the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*.

> Now once there was a dispute between the Spirit and the Word. "I am excellent" said the Spirit and the Word said "I am excellent". The Spirit said:

17 See, e.g. the introductory remarks to "Veda and Upanisad" by Laurie L. Patton, *The Hindu World*, eds. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), Ch. 2.

18 For the theme of "Christianness" see Raimon Panikkar, "The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* eds. John Hick and Paul Knitter (London: SCM, 1988), 89–116. The lack of attention to the historical formation of the Christian Trinitarian tradition is the nub of the criticism that Rowan Williams makes in his deeply appreciative assessment of "Trinity and Pluralism."

> "I am certainly better than you, because you do not utter anything which is not previously understood by me. So you just imitate what I am doing and simply follow me. I am certainly better than you." The Word said: "I am certainly better than you, because whatever you know, I make it known. I communicate it." They went to Prajapati, asking for his decision. Prajapati spoke in favour of the Spirit, saying to the Word: "The Spirit is certainly better, because you only imitate and follow what the Spirit is doing; and he who is imitating and following what another does is undoubtedly inferior."[19]

Panikkar opens his discussion with the observation that India has opted for the Spirit while the West has opted for the Word. The Word stresses clarity, distinction, science, and technology. The Spirit "feels, is concerned, contemplates and is easily satisfied at the price of being blind to externals; it is joyful and happy." Maybe the time has come, he muses, when "the twins will have to meet if our world is to survive,"[20] At first, it sounds as if he is simply throwing in his lot with a popular Orientalism, resolving the active/passive binary in favour of the pursuit of a contemplative interiority. His point is more nuanced than that.

As we read on, the significance of the subtitle, "The Smile of the Buddha" becomes apparent. Just as Panikkar can say at the end of his life that Christ is "neither myself nor another," so here the Buddha is no mystical symbol or principle of unity but an exemplar of a more complex model of human transformation. Panikkar shares that smile, not a smile of smug self-congratulation, as if he has seen something others have failed to grasp, but an inner contentment that speaks wordlessly of freedom and equanimity, what Bodhidharma famously called a special transmission "not depending on books and letters, pointing directly to the mind of Man."[21] What puts a rather different gloss on the parable is the next verse which Panikkar leaves out of this article but does include in the *Vedic Experience*. The parable concludes:

> As the Word was thus refuted, she became ashamed and miscarried. The Word spoke to Prajapati; "I shall never become the carrier of your oblation, I whom you have refuted!" Therefore, whatever in the sacrifice is performed for Prajapati is done in a low voice, because the Word refused to carry the oblation to Prajapati.[22]

19 *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* I, 4, 5, 8–12. Quoted in "Silence and the Word: The Smile of the Buddha," in *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, ed. Raimon Panikkar (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983), 258–76. See also *Vedic Experience*, 107–8.

20 "Silence and the Word," 259.

21 Taken from Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 113; quoting Charles Eliot's translation in *Japanese Buddhism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1969).

22 *Vedic Experience*, 108.

Panikkar's juxtaposition of Word and Spirit – *vāc* and *manas* – sounds wonderfully provocative to Western Christian ears. But as recorded within the *Brāhmaṇas*, it is less about ranking cosmic concepts than sketching out the trajectory taken by the sacrificial tradition, away from a ritualised world in which all of creation, including gods and human beings, participate to the more subtle realm of inner meanings.

Panikkar uses his "imparative" method to act as a vehicle with which to effect a journey into the unknown. He is making the point, familiar to the Buddhist, that understanding is inseparable from instruction. "Life," he says, "does not allow itself to be compartmentalized – although for the purpose of exposition we might proceed by way of analysis."[23] It sounds at times as if he is subordinating Word-as-text into the grand narrative of the interior journey. I suspect more is going on than that. Word is "inferior" to Spirit, but only in the sense that the work of communication, making things known, comes out of an ever-expanding pattern of transformative experience in which all human beings are inextricably embedded.

At stake is a point he makes in the Preface to *Trinity*, something I find reflected in my two personal experiences of Panikkar, the bulldozing mystic. One response to what he calls, quoting Aquinas, the "misery of terms" is a knowing silence – and sometimes, as in the case of the Buddha, silence is the only adequate response. But the smiling silence of the enlightened one is nevertheless a *response*, a wordless communication not a withdrawal into the company of the initiated elite. The human predicament, says Panikkar, "is a speaking one."[24] Words can never adequately express the truth of things but that does not exempt us from the labour of authentic interpretation and communication. To use Panikkarian terms, the order of *mythos* is inconclusive and empty without the order of *logos*. And vice versa: the order of *logos* only makes sense within the context of a particular *mythos*, the framework of symbol and metaphor with which people strive to shape their understanding. The parable juxtaposes Word and Spirit, *Vāc* and *Manas*, form and feeling, West and East. The challenge, however, is not to make distinctions but, having made them, to hold them together in a greater whole.

This is Panikkar's dilemma – indeed that of "dual belonging" in general. How in any particular instance, are *logos* and *mythos* – the received form of signs and words, and the generative power of imaginative engagement – to interact? To put the same question another way, how is the tension between *this* particular moment of clarity or discovery, what makes sense *now*, and the struggle to understand, to get a fuller and broader picture of the whole, to be maintained? In response, I will first unpack a little more of the three spiritualities that underpin *Trinity* and then turn by way of counterpoint to the theme of the creative and communicative Word as it is articulated in Part I of *The Vedic Experience*.

23 The concluding words of "The Three Paths of Spirituality: the Three *Marga,*" from *Opera Omnia*, Volume IV.2, p. 112.

24 *Trinity,* viii.

Spiritual "Attitudes" and the Trinity

After a brief introduction, what Panikkar calls "far more a meditation than an erudite study, far more a mystical and 'praying' theology than an analytical and cogitative philosophy," is divided into three sections: first, the characteristic forms of spirituality to be found as a "human invariant in the majority of religions"; second, a consideration of the mystery of the Trinity; third, "theandrism" as the fundamental attitude through which it is possible to understand the basic insights of the world's religions.[25] Approximately, half the book is taken up with the first section and almost half of that is given to the third spirituality, called here *Advaita*. To that extent it is clear that Panikkar's major interest lies with Spirit or *Manas*, the "way of knowledge" or wisdom. Nevertheless, it is clear that he wants to integrate the three patterns described by these human invariants into a differentiated yet harmonious whole.

The first form of spirituality turns on a distinction between idolatry and what he calls iconolatry, the former consisting of the transference to a creature of the worship due to God alone, the latter taking a privileged object of adoration as the point of departure for an obedient yet arduous ascent to God. The spirituality of the icon, what Panikkar in his third section of the book calls the spirituality of the Father, acts as a starting point for the religious life, an embedding in a tradition defined in terms of icon and symbol which cultivates a sense of God as life-giving source and origin. In terms of the *trimarga*, it takes its rise from the "way of *karma*," the "work of the people" or, more exactly, the work that *is* the people, the *leitourgia* that celebrates life-giving memories and opens up a scripture-soaked world of meaning.

The second spirituality, what Panikkar calls personalism, is derived from the mystery of the human person as revealed by the God who initiates a face-to-face relationship of loving intimacy. As with a liturgical *karmamarga*, his description of the "way of devotion" or *bhaktimarga* owes more to the Old Testament background to Christianity than it does to the proliferating vernacular sects that take their rise from the dissemination of Epic and Puranic traditions. The *Bhagavad Gītā* is quoted but more in support of a trajectory towards the *advaitic* experience than as the beginning of a distinctive tradition informed by an emotional rather than intellectualist *bhakti*.[26] According to Panikkar, the New Testament takes up a chastened version of the Jewish "monolithic monotheism," with the God of Israel refracted into human lives through the person of Jesus. The relationship of a subservient obedience gives way to values of love, friendship, and intimacy, modelled after Jesus's own relationship with the one he calls Abba. The broader dynamics of personalism, shared across the Jewish-Christian divide, and so important in understanding the development of the early Jesus community as

25 Ibid., 6–7.

26 I take this illuminating distinction from Friedhelm Hardy's monumental study of Tamil bhakti, *Viraha Bhakti* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

a movement of devotional mysticism in the first decades of the Church's life, are hardly noted.

Instead, Panikkar contents himself with drawing attention to the danger of an unrestricted *bhakti* – an overidentification with the beloved that ends up reducing God to human form, to a negative self-serving immanence. His point is more pedagogical than systematic. Like any single spirituality practised without due reference to other spiritual attitudes or "human invariants," personalism or humanism risks producing an impoverished and inadequate account of the human condition, let alone a theology that can engage creatively with the plurality of religions.

The third spirituality, as we have noted, is more elliptically described as *Advaita*. Here, Panikkar is keen to distinguish between the interpersonal relationship with God and one in which a potentially unbalancing focus on the ego is overcome. In turning to the *Upaniṣads* as his central witness to a spiritual attitude he finds wanting in Christianity, it is clear that his main concern is to elucidate his own experience of what he calls at one point "deep prayer."[27] This is no yogic *Kaivalyam* or monistic merging, a heightened or ecstatic form of self-consciousness. It has a much more intellectualist feel to it, being based on the *mahāvākyāni*, the "great sayings" that act as the sedimentation of the richness of Vedic revelation: "the ultimate and immanent Ground of beings, to which the *Upaniṣads* make their essential witness."[28] The mystic seeks only to apprehend this truth about Being with silence, awe and a self-effacing detachment. Again, in his concern to build an holistic spirituality which balances the three primary "attitudes" towards whatever has transcendent value, Panikkar adds a critical word about an excessive "angelism," as he puts it, which expresses a "disdain for or forgetfulness of the bodily."[29] The spirituality of the Spirit concludes Panikkar:

> has no right to ignore the fact that our life is still *in the making*, that it is *in fieri*, be-coming, that there is within us a movement towards the Absolute and that we have not yet arrived at Being though Being has already come to us.[30]

It is Panikkar's *caveat*, "we have not yet arrived," that is crucially important. If we are back to the "primacy" of the Spirit, it is only in a highly qualified sense. The tantalising admission that Being "has already come" reminds us that, as Panikkar says, the *Upaniṣadic* tradition contains theistic texts as well as the more impersonal focus on the equivalence of *Brahman* and *Ātman*. That almost indefinable breadth of context is important – and not just because without it his meditative focus is mono-dimensional and lacks the rich devotionalism that is such a significant feature of Hinduism. That is not to say that Christianity or *bhakti* Hinduism is irredeemably kataphatic, only that apophatic theologies exist in dialectical

27 *Trinity*, 34: described as "that of the creature who neither knows who does it nor that it is done."
28 *Trinity*, 35.
29 Ibid., 80.
30 Ibid., 82.

relationship with the images they can be said to supersede. In all religious traditions, if Being is not to be reduced to an abstraction with no purchase on the ineluctable wholeness-in-difference of things, it needs to be related to, and realised through, the concrete particularities which make Being precisely *real*. Hinduism, says Panikkar provocatively, does not have an essence but it does have an *existence*; it cannot be separated from the practice of persons, of Hindus. Thus, Hindus talk of *sanātana dharma*, the "endless" or "primordial" *dharma* common to the whole of humanity – "the collective participation of all in the duty of maintaining cohesion in the world."[31]

This is where Panikkar seems most at home, with his own holistic version of the dialogues of "religious experience" and "theological exchange." But if, as I have argued, *Trinity* is more personal manifesto than theological treatise, has he built a home which others can inhabit or at least recognise as offering the possibility of an hospitable "dual belonging"?

The self between worlds

In turning to the *Vedic Experience*, I am not looking to complement what Panikkar says about true personhood in *Trinity* but to offer a different angle on his recurrent theme of the self that is fully implicated in the work of understanding and loving. To repeat the saying quoted earlier: "A non-trinitarian Man cannot jump outside his little self, cannot become what he wants and longs for without destroying himself."[32]

What *Vedic Experience* holds in common with *Trinity* is that both foreground a liturgical performance which generates a sense of belonging, or more exactly a "self between worlds," a paradoxical relationality that works itself out in a desire for wholeness that can never be properly realised except in terms of desire itself. The classic *advaitic* position is, of course, that one does not love the other for the sake of the other but for the sake of *ātman*.[33] There is no doubt that Panikkar finds a deep truth here; the renunciation of the *sannyāsī* is not a matter of giving things up which are good in themselves (that, as he says, would be sheer masochism) but part of that personal-yet-holistic drive to reckon with and overcome all forms of dualism.

The Brahmanical tradition of the *Veda* gives rise to multiple strands of thought, making Hinduism *both* a religion of love *and* a religion of knowledge. In practice, *bhakti* predominates, but *jñāna* claims superiority, regarding *bhakti* as a preliminary step on the way to an intuitive awareness of Being. Panikkar is concerned about the nature of that "preliminary step" – to what extent it is purely introductory or plays a more substantial role in transforming the self. Things are not objects that can be made subject to the all-comprehending gaze. Rather,

31 See Panikkar's introduction to *Opera Omnia*, IV.2, xxii.

32 *Trinity*, 12.

33 See, e.g. *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* II.4.5.

"things are nothing if not the crystallisations of divine Love."[34] His question is how things – or more awkwardly *other persons* – may be loved "for the sake of *ātman*," that is, without their becoming an idolatrous fixation, being subsumed into a pre-existent *idea* of the beloved. So, he comes back time and again to the non-dual experience of *Advaita* as an intuition that is inseparable from a focused and engaged yet singularly all-embracing love.

The structure of the *Vedic Experience* is, as already noted, massively complex. Here, I can do no more than touch on a few key ideas from Part One, entitled Dawn and Birth, and focus on Panikkar's problematic as set out in one particular verse from RV 1.164 which Panikkar takes as the "motto of our anthology."[35]

The collection as a whole is prefaced by an introductory comment on the *Gayatri* which speaks about the power of the *mantra* as *śabdabrahman* to encapsulate and order the whole of reality.[36] He then opens up a brilliant commentary on some of the most significant creation hymns, including the *Nāsadīya Sūkta* (RV X.129), the *Hiraṇyagarbha* myth (RV X.121), and the *Puruṣa Sūkta* (RV X.90). He sets out three moments within the Vedic *mythos* that he finds "helpful for our understanding: Solitude, Sacrifice, Integration."[37] This is what the enlightened sage knows: the stages that build up knowledge-as-wisdom. As Panikkar puts it:

> [T]he wise Man, described time and again in the *śruti*, is not the escapist and unfriendly solitary, but the full Man who, having realized his own limitations, knows how to enter into the infinite ocean of *sat, cit* and *ananda*, of being, consciousness and joy.[38]

For Panikkar, the Vedic revelation is not a matter of passing on certain esoteric facts or a subtle gnosis that would be unknown were it not for the privileged insight of the ageless rishis. It is, more precisely, the unfolding of a process in which the listener becomes self-conscious and attuned to the "sound-and-meaning aspect of reality itself."[39]

This is where the risk of faith properly belongs: an openness to the mystery of beginnings and wonder before the immensity and harmony of existence which dares ask the existential questions. Why being rather than nothing? What is the nature of *idam*, *tad ekam*, "this One"? Into how many parts is creation divided? What can be seen and what remains invisible? The questions are, of course, scattered throughout the Vedas. But none of the "answers" would be complete without that famous note of hesitant scepticism: "That out of which creation has arisen, whether it held its form or it did not, he who surveys it in the highest heaven, he surely knows – or maybe he does not!" (RV X.129.7)

34 See "A Letter from Vrndavan," in *Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics*, 283.
35 *Vedic Experience*, 99.
36 Ibid., 38–39.
37 Ibid., 51.
38 Ibid., 54.
39 Ibid., 14.

Echoing the last words of *Trinity*, Panikkar talks of the key cosmogonic images of birth and origins as laying out not the "content" of philosophical speculation but the conditions without which any investigation into the great themes of light and life and liberation would be impossible. "The true 'be-coming' is an authentic *coming to be*; but do not ask where it comes from lest you stop the very becoming."[40] Into the middle of the solitude of "all this," so far described in Panikkar's anthology in terms of a *Prelude* of tentative hints and imaginings, is spoken "*vac*, the Word, the Firstborn." *Vāc*, says Panikkar, is more than sound or image or a vehicle for spiritual gnosis. It is the whole of *śruti*, revelation itself which pre-exists before anything came to be, a feminine principle who announces "the tidings that Gods and men alike rejoice to hear" (RV X.125, 5).

Drawn from the performative utterance of the ritual, *vāc* is reflected in the instruction of the *guru* that underpins *jñāna-marga* as well as in the rhythms of *nāma-japa* that give shape to *bhakti-marga*. In the last analysis, such name-giving is a "divine function," an act proper to God which in the sacrifice is mediated through seers who "fashioned the Word by means of their mind, sifting it as with sieves the corn is sifted" (RV X.71.2–3). To that extent, *vāc* is both the subject and the object of speech, both revelation and language, both the mystery of things that overwhelms the Vedic rishis and the inner source of truth that inspires the *Upaniṣadic* sages.[41] At the heart of the former is the beginning of wonder and delight; with the latter is opened up the possibility of self-reflection, of turning the disturbance of solitude back on itself. On the "power of this enigma" Panikkar offers a pithy aphorism. "Metaphysics and linguistic analysis," he says, "meet in *vac*."[42] This does not mean that Word and Spirit represent distinct yet correlative cosmic principles which somehow pervade the whole of reality and are forever vying for prominence. Rather, *manas* as consciousness provides the fertile ground in which *vāc* can impact and grow while, at the same time, *vāc* always exceeds the limits of *manas* to comprehend and control what it encounters.

This is where the tersely expressed *caveats* of Trinity come into play. How to keep in creative tension those three spiritual attitudes that speak together of the single yet complex journey of faith? How to deal with the very human tendency to hang on to what is known, what appears secure, and proof against the unknown and threatening "otherness" of things? To return to Panikkar's dilemma with which we started, how is the self that exists on that perplexing edge between worlds to avoid doing violence to the very mystery it contemplates and seeks to serve?

Let me turn finally to a single verse from the Vedic anthology. RV 1.164, one of the more perplexing and obscure speculations on the inner meaning of the sacrifice, mixes strange homologies with moments of exquisite philosophical meditation. At one level, the poet seems only concerned to soak listeners in the wonder

40 Ibid., 48.
41 Ibid., 109.
42 Ibid., 99.

of words, to let the sounds themselves evoke an affective response to the marvels of what they behold. At another, the imagery provokes questions about the cosmic meaning of the ritual elements and the intentionality of the *yajamāna*. Panikkar's selection of verses here is very limited and one all but misses the intensity of the moment when the poet shifts gear from working through a wearisome list of riddles and symbols and turns inward, musing on the near hopelessness of his task:

What thing I am I do not know.
I wander secluded, burdened by my mind (*samnaddho manasā*).
When the First-born of Truth has come to me
I receive a share in that self-same Word. (*vaco aśnuve bhāghamasyāh)*[43]

Manas, what Panikkar translates as "Spirit" but more exactly the power of a mindful consciousness, what makes human beings most deeply human, can become a "burden" or barrier not a liberation, precisely because it makes us conscious of self, and all that the self touches and can be said to inhabit. The scientist in Panikkar draws attention to what we have known instinctively long before Heisenberg came up with his Principle in 1927: that "the mind modifies the 'minded' – that thought changes what has been thought or observation the observed."[44] That is the first half of the verse, the problematic that raises the dilemma. We wander round the world in search of what we do not know, desiring that which somehow propels us forward and subject always to the projections the mind constructs for itself. Yet, consciousness can tell us *that* we are; it cannot tell us *what* we are. The "original sin" of a knowledge that destroys innocence and does violence to the fabric of reality traps us in an insatiable desire to know the origin of "all this."

Yet Panikkar, scientist and philosopher, is also a theologian acutely conscious of the importance of resisting any premature sense of finality. Thus, he finds in the second half of the verse something that constantly accompanies and subverts the desire to stand above the limitations of the present moment. This is nothing less than the rhythms that vibrate out of the depths of creation and find themselves inscribed in the *mantras* of an ancient wisdom, the "sound-and-meaning aspect of reality." Responding to the Word of Truth that mysteriously haunts the depths of consciousness brings with it the enlightening *jñāna* or the transforming *bhakti* – *provided* it is recognised not as a possession to be grasped and protected but as a gift to be received and shared in love. As Panikkar eloquently puts it:

> There is something that does not come from Man as involution, evolution, or development, but falls upon him and hits him as a revolution, revelation, and surprise. It is the mystery of the Word which makes Man aware that he is

43 Ibid., 102. Wendy Doniger's translation from *The Rig Veda:* "I do not know just what it is that I am like. I wander about concealed and wrapped in thought. When the first born of Order came to me, I won a share of this Speech" (p. 79).

44 See Introduction to *Opera Omnia* IV.2, xxiii.

> primarily a spoken rather than speaking reality, a spoken rather than a speaking Word, a receiver rather than a giver.[45]

That movement from the burden of consciousness to the "Vedic epiphany" provides the fundamental framework within which Panikkar can talk about the "cosmotheandric mystery," an interaction between the source of absolute truth we call God and what is most profoundly human about life in this world of everyday experience. In these terms for Panikkar, the Trinity is more than the Christian doctrine of God but also an interpretive framework within which the diversity of religions is to be understood as more than ever-shifting contingent phenomena. This is what Min, quoted earlier, refers to as Panikkar's "ontological pluralism": not a *de facto* pluralism but a "*de jure* pluralism that does not merely tolerate but positively welcomes difference as such."[46]

Human beings, situated yet relational

The question I have tried to pursue in this contribution to the conundrums of Hindu-Christian "dual belonging" is about the Panikkarian "imparative" method of writing out of an intense engagement with his own mystical journey into the Unknown. Panikkar will always remain something of a maverick as far as Hindu-Christian relations are concerned. Hindus will have reservations about his account of Hinduism, Christians will raise questions about his theology of Christic consciousness or the cosmotheandric mystery. And his attempt to integrate the dialogues of religious experience and theological exchange will not satisfy those critics who call for attention to the more hard-edged ethical and political concerns of religious belonging in the twenty-first century.

Nevertheless, his personally instantiated version of pluralism, with its joyful acceptance of an irreducible diversity, goes a long way towards overcoming the binaries of subjects and objects, insiders and outsiders, that tend to dominate interreligious encounter. That is precisely not to say that he comes up with some position above diversity – for "one cannot jump over one's shadow." We are always situated, caught up in the "middle of things," with no possibility of a complete overview. To that extent, we are radically "inside" and can only speak out of the particular culture of myth and symbol and inherited meanings that have made us what we are. Yet, that does not make us purely passive recipients. For Panikkar, there is more to wisdom and learning than problem-solving; what he calls the "dialogical dialogue" is about acquiring a certain sensitivity to the ways in which *other subjects like me* learn how to exist in and adjust to an environment which they have acquired – or simply been born into. As self-conscious beings we are related to, if not defined by, what is other or "outside"; despite the risk of disturbing the delicate fabric of what is "given," we go on engaging with others and take responsibility for building up intra-human relations.

45 *Vedic Experience*, 100.

46 Min, "Loving without Understanding," 63.

If I understand anything about Panikkar, it is that the verbal bulldozer who liked to be in control and have the last word was almost obsessively conscious that the sheer diversity of things which inhabits "the between" makes the work of questioning and ordering necessary yet impossible. And that is the challenge to any coherent sense of dual belonging. Towards the end of his life the contemplative appears to have won out over the bulldozer. Encroaching mortality is only the most obvious, and overwhelming, example of limitation – and the most difficult to reckon with. However, much we human beings may yearn for what takes us out of ourselves and grants the satisfaction of our deepest desires, we are inextricably caught into this place and this moment.

To be human is to seek the source of "all this," to put easy assumptions and received wisdom to the ultimate test of a life that seeks only the God beyond distinctions and divisions. The journey of faith cannot avoid the reasoned exploration of what is given to thought, for human beings can never be satisfied with a merely partial view of truth; that is why I find myself "burdened by my mind." Hence that diary entry with which I began: a rare example of how Panikkar overcomes talk *of* God with an address *to* God, calling on God in the vocative. I wonder if that favourite Vedic verse spoke to him then: how much has the Spirit-*manas* that drives him worked with rather than against the Word-*vāc* that has already spoken and continues to form the loving context of all human living? Panikkar was always convinced in faith of the ultimate harmony of things yet now he seems poignantly aware that he is confronted by the God who is not *Aliud* but *Alter*. If the search for understanding is not to become fixated on an ideology of resistance, a risky finality, somehow a shift has to be made from the primacy of thought to a different dynamic, to participation in "a spoken rather than a speaking Word," being "a receiver rather than a giver, created rather than creator." Is this what Panikkar glimpsed as death circled around him?

When he died on 26 August 2010, some of his ashes were buried in the small cemetery in Tavertet; some were scattered on the waters of the sacred Ganges, according to ancient Hindu tradition. As in life, so in death, Panikkar lived across borders, claiming to be at home in two very different and diverse religious cultures.

References

Panikkar texts

The Intrareligious Dialogue. New York: Paulist, 1978.

"The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges." In *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, edited by John Hick and Paul Knitter, 89–116. London: SCM, 1988.

Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1983.

Opera Omnia. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014.

Panikkar, Pavan et al., eds. *Raimon Panikkar: His Legacy and Vision*. Somaiya Publications, 2008.

The Rhythm of Being. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010.

"Toward an Ecumenical Theandric Spirituality." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (1968): 507–34.

The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man. New York and London: Orbis, 1973.

The Trinity and World Religions. Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1970.
The Vedic Experience: Mantramañjari: An Anthology of the Vedas for Modern Man and Contemporary Celebration, edited and translated with introductions and notes by Raimundo Panikkar with the collaboration of N. Shanta, M.A.R. Rogers, B. Bäumer, and M. Bidoli. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978.
The Water of the Drop, edited by Milena Carrara Pavan. New Delhi: ISPCK, 2018.

Other references

Cappellini, Roberta, Giuseppe Cognetti, and Anna Maria Natalini, eds. "Symposium on the Dialogical Dialogue and Raimon Panikkar." *CIRPIT Review* 5 (2014).
Clooney, Francis X. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
———. *The Future of Hindu-Christian Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017.
Doniger, Wendy. *The Rig Veda*. London: Penguin, 1981.
Eliot, Charles. *Japanese Buddhism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1969.
Hardy, Friedhelm. *Viraha Bhakti*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
Min, Anselm. "Loving without Understanding: Raimon Panikkar's Ontological Pluralism." *International Journal of Philosophy of Religion* 68 (2010): 59–75.
Mittal, Sushil, and Gene Thursby, eds. *The Hindu World*. New York and London: Routledge, 2004.
Phan, Peter, and Young-chan Ro, eds. *Raimon Panikkar: A Companion to His Life and Thought*. Cambridge: James Clarke, 2018.
Prabhu, Joseph, ed. *The Intercultural Challenge of Raimon Panikkar*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996.
Ranstrom, Erik, and Bob Robinson. *'Without Ceasing to Be a Christian': A Catholic and Protestant Assess the Christological Contribution of Raimon Panikkar*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.
Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
Williams, Rowan. "Trinity and Pluralism." In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, edited by Gavin D'Costa, 3–15. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

4 The possibility of Hindu-Christian dual belonging

Anthropological reflections on a theological debate

Ankur Barua

The question of whether a particular individual can simultaneously inhabit multiple – or, less ambitiously, two – religious worldviews has been intensely debated in recent years from various philosophical, theological, and sociological standpoints. For the greater part of the last two millennia on European horizons, "religious belonging" has been viewed as conceptually equivalent to "belonging to the *one* true religion," so that the central theological task regarding religious aliens would involve the composition of exegetical treatises on their post-mortem spiritual destiny. The debates over *dual* religious belonging that we witness today have been facilitated by several decades of global migrations, socio-economic transitions, and intellectual shifts. In 1920, an English Roman Catholic woman in London who might have developed an interest in Hindu yoga would have encountered a slew of divisive barriers – epistemic, cultural, and imperial – which various sociopolitical transformations have largely removed from cosmopolitan European locations. Thus, one does not have to travel to the distant Orient to encounter living practitioners of yoga, and aspects of yogic contemplation are being gradually incorporated – though not always without contestation – into medical practices, office cultures, and even Catholic contemplative forms.

From the 1970s onwards, such shifts have also informed the practices of interreligious dialogue, in which the members of one religious tradition seek to develop empathetic understandings of the worldviews of the members of another. However, the existential impetus of "dual religious belonging" would seem to take us much further than respectful learning, dialogical interaction, and attentive participation – the claim is not only that an individual situated within one religious tradition can cultivate a sympathetic understanding of the lifeworlds of another religious tradition but also that she can simultaneously inhabit both. In this essay, we will argue that this momentous question, "Is such dual indwelling possible?" should be properly disambiguated as: "Is it possible *theo-logically*?" and "Is it possible *anthropologically*?" With respect to Hindu-Christian dual religious belonging, we will see that these two inquiries take us along somewhat different academic pathways, and the sorts of answers that their conceptual-existential terrains yield are not quite congruent. Thus, it may turn out that certain styles of dual indwelling are "theo-logically" discouraged or prohibited by exegetical readings of the Bible or of a Hindu socio-religious treatise, and

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-4

yet Hindus and Christians at the grassroots "anthropologically" claim to already practise such indwelling. Such dissonances – or even divergences – between "top-down" doctrinaire diktats about what a particular tradition *should be* and "bottom-up" ethnographic observations of how that tradition is *lived out* in concrete socio-historical circumstances partly constitute the bread and butter of the academic study of religion.

It is these dynamic intersections between, on the one hand, the exegetical formulations of scriptural theology and, on the other hand, the quotidian messiness of existential locations that this essay will explore through three interrelated stages. I begin with some of the key concepts, and argue that certain instances of what are put forward as "*dual* religious belonging" in Hindu-Christian contexts may turn out not to be such. I move on to argue that while such patterns of "dual *religious* belonging" may indeed be conceptually inconsistent, individuals across certain Euro-American locations increasingly find themselves in social milieus where some measure of malleability in religious affiliations or orientations is existentially plausible and spiritually meaningful. While such fluidity of "dual religious *belonging*" is sometimes castigated as a lamentable corruption of the true faith, I explore the question of whether "*singular* religious belonging" can be rationally defended in sociocultural contexts inhabited by Hindus and Christians who mutually recognise one another as epistemic peers. Here, I suggest that it is not logically transparent that the burden of proof should always fall on those who cultivate patterns of dual religious orientations. To my theologically minded readers, my conclusion in the final section – namely, it all remains a mystery – should not come as a surprise, but the essay itself is offered as a conceptual analysis of some anthropological locations of Hindu-Christian shared belongings till we get to the eschatological unveiling.

Donning logical hats

If a Roman Catholic woman – call her Regan – were to become a member of the fan club of the football team Manchester United, we would not usually regard her double affiliations as a style of dual *religious* belonging, for no matter how passionately devoted she might be to the material and spiritual welfare of the team members, a religious way of living seems to demand a more universal, comprehensive, and irrevocable set of commitments. Thus, while Regan can leave her football team at the doorstep when she enters her office every weekday morning, she cannot – according to Catholic magisterial teaching, at least – neatly parcel out bits and pieces of her life, selectively mark some of them as "religious," and cast aside the others as "non-religious." That is, Catholicism is a complete package that applies to all aspects of her human (and post-earthly) existence.[1]

1 Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 495–519.

Catholicism is, of course, not unique in this self-understanding, for most of the other so-called world religions too present themselves as totalistic worldviews that permeate all dimensions of the individual, interpersonal, and social existence of their adherents. Thus, devout Hindu Vaiṣṇavas often seek to embody in their quotidian existences the exhortation of Kṛṣṇa to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "Whatever thou doest, whatever thou eatest, whatever thou offerest, whatever thou givest away, whatever austerities thou dost practise – do that, O son of Kuntī (Arjuna), as an offering to me" (9.27).[2] Again, consider the following verses of Nammāḻvār (*c*.700 CE), which indicate his passionate immersion in the love of Viṣṇu, whom he adores as the majestic Lord and as the sole refuge of embodied selves caught in worldly bondage.

What am I to do? Who is my support?
What are you doing with me?
I desire nothing
that anyone other than you can fulfil
Glance at me; resolve that all the dear days
that I, your servant, have yet to live
shall pass with my holding your feet.[3]

Now, the theological problem relating to dual religious belonging emerges precisely at this point when each of two religious worldviews is understood in a globalising sense as a distinctive set of beliefs, practices, and ritual modes of worship which demands "full-time commitment" from their practitioners.[4] Consider, for instance, the everyday religious existence of some Hindus who have developed styles of devotion to Jesus, Kṛṣṇa, and (the goddess) Lakṣmī, on the grounds that these iconic presences are partial, provisional, and penultimate pointers to the absolute beyond all descriptions. From a social anthropological perspective, such styles of devotion are quite common across metropolitan and semi-urban India. However, we do not quite have here an instance of "*dual* religious belonging," for this juxtaposition of multiple deities is a modernised expression of the classical Advaita Vedāntic standpoint that all forms of devotion can be treated as limited indicators of the ineffable divine reality which transcends every trace of duality. That is, "Jesus," Kṛṣṇa," and Lakṣmī" are to be envisioned not as three coeternal beings but as humanly shaped pointers to the Advaita-intimated reality beyond all descriptions (*nirguṇa Brahman*).

Nor would we have an expression of "*dual* religious belonging" in the instance of an Indian Catholic who is fairly orthodox in accepting the teachings of the

2 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, ed., *The Bhagavadgītā* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963), 249.

3 John Carman and Vasudha Narayanan, *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷan's Interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḻi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 217.

4 Catherine Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23 (2003): 45.

magisterium but who occasionally participates in Vaiṣṇava devotional singing, on the grounds that she discerns intimations of the cruciform divine in such congregational settings. She does not set aside her commitment to Christ as "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) on crossing the threshold of a Vaiṣṇava temple – she is somehow able to incorporate her sonic experiences into her wider Catholic visions of the spiritual value of Vaiṣṇava devotional love (*bhakti*). Thus, Raimon Panikkar – born to a Spanish Catholic mother and a Hindu father – too was deeply shaped by diverse forms of spiritualities, but he remained, at the end of the day, a Christian: "I 'left' as a Christian, 'found myself' a Hindu, and 'return' as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."[5]

To understand the structure of "dual religious belonging" from a theological perspective consider the following three propositions:

P1: The ultimate reality cannot be encapsulated within or be reduced to any human description, category, or classification. However, linguistic expressions, informed by the *Upaniṣads*, which indicate that the ultimate reality is transpersonal are *more* truth-tracking than linguistic expressions which indicate that the ultimate reality is supremely personal. (Advaita Vedānta)

P2: The ultimate reality cannot be encapsulated within or be reduced to any human description, category, or classification. However, linguistic expressions, informed by the Christian Bible, which indicate that the ultimate reality is Triune-shaped are *more* truth-tracking than linguistic expressions which indicate that the ultimate reality is transpersonal or that the ultimate reality is Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-shaped. (Catholic doctrine)

P3: The ultimate reality cannot be encapsulated within or be reduced to any human description, category, or classification. However, linguistic expressions, informed by the *Upaniṣads*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, which indicate that the ultimate reality is Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa-shaped are *more* truth-tracking than linguistic expressions which indicate that the ultimate reality is transpersonal or that the ultimate reality is Triune-shaped. (Bengal Vaiṣṇavism)

The fundamental question here is whether – from a theological point of view – a single individual can indwell a universe which is structured by *both* P1 *and* P2, or by *both* P2 *and* P3, or by *both* P1 *and* P3, in which scenarios we would indeed have cases of "*dual* religious belonging." As for the first possibility (*both* P1 *and* P2), Henri le Saux (Swami Abhishiktananda), a French Benedictine monk who cultivated some aspects of the Advaitic quest for the divine in the ineffable silences of the interior life, would seem to be a promising example. He strikingly refers to the prologue of John's gospel as the "supreme Christian Upanishad" – just as the Upaniṣads speak of "successive identifications" between the human and the divine through statements such as "I am Brahman" and "That thou art,"

5 Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 2.

the prologue too seeks, by elaborating a series of mysterious connections, not to solve intellectual conundrums about the "one and the three" but to draw us towards the divine abyss.[6]

However, while Abhishiktananda spoke of a Christian "non-duality" (*advaita*), which is indicated by Biblical statements such as "God is Love," he also noted at times that from a Christian standpoint, the Advaitic experience is *not* the ultimate truth (i.e. he would reject P1). Rather, the Advaitic cultivation of interiority can be seen as the essential moment of dying to self before an individual can be prepared by the Spirit for the full revelation of the divine glory in the mystery of grace (as intimated at P2).[7] Positioned "between" Advaita and the Christian faith, this is how Abhishiktananda described his spiritual anguish in 1952: "I am torn, rent in two, between Christ and my brothers. . . . When I pray per Christum, they cannot follow me. . . . And I cannot unite myself to my people [that is, Hindu friends] in their symbolic religion, because I am a priest of the true religion [that is, Christianity], and thus I fail to have communion with my people in what is the highest and most divine in them."[8]

Thus, Abhishiktananda, at least around the time of 1952, felt pulled between two "absolutes" – the Advaitic ineffable silence (P1) and the Triune mystery (P2). The problem – on a theological plane – is that an absolute, by definition, does not brook an ontological rival. While we can employ enumerative idioms to say, "Here is *one* book and there is *another* book," we cannot meaningfully say, "Here is *one* absolute and there is *another* absolute," for the absolute is that which surpasses everything else. Now, suppose one were to propose, to alleviate the logical opposition between the "absolute" of Advaita and the "absolute" of Catholicism, the following conception of the ultimate reality, by pointing to a yet deeper Absolute beyond these absolutes:

> P4: The ultimate reality cannot be encapsulated within or be reduced to any human description, category, or classification. However, such is the logic of the non-finite that all linguistic expressions are *equally* truth-tracking – whether they indicate that the ultimate reality is transpersonal or whether they indicate that the ultimate reality is supremely personal.

That is, while the Advaita "absolute" and the Catholic "absolute" seem to us to be logically opposed from the perspectives of our finite human intellects, the ultimate basis of reality is the Absolute in which these so-called absolutes are all intertwined, reconciled, and harmonised. Whether or not such an Absolute truly exists – that is, the higher Absolute to "absolutize" all lower absolutes – or

6 Swami Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point: Within the Cave of the Heart* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1969), 82.

7 Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, 84.

8 Shirley du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 165.

whether or not this Absolute is only a cognitive hypothesis framed by human intellects are famous debates that we do not explore here. This is because so far as the motif of "*dual* religious belonging" is concerned, an appeal to P4 would not help us, for the sets of *both* P1 *and* P4, or *both* P2 *and* P4, or *both* P3 *and* P4, are still not logically consistent. Consider, for instance, the conceptual coherence of the set "*both* P1 *and* P4." Here, P1 affirms that linguistic expressions which indicate that the ultimate reality is transpersonal are *more* truth-tracking than linguistic expressions which indicate that the ultimate reality is personal, but this is precisely the view that P4 rejects – for P4 claims that both sets of linguistic expressions are equally truth-tracking.

Inhabiting existential ambiguities

Fortunately, or unfortunately, life is larger than logic. If in the previous section, I have indicated that at a theological level, "dual religious belonging," in the sense of indwelling aspects of two particular "complete package" religious universes, where each is oriented to a distinctive ontological absolute, is conceptually inconsistent, I will now argue that from some anthropological perspectives, such elasticity in religious affiliation is already an everyday fact of life for certain individuals.

Here are the life-narrative sketches of three such individuals:

> Thomas, who is born in Birmingham to a Catholic mother and a Hindu Vaiṣṇava father, was raised as a Catholic. However, in his early forties, he gradually begins to move away from Catholicism, as he begins to query which particular conception of the divine – Catholic or Vaiṣṇava Hindu – is more truth-oriented, experientially plausible, and spiritually meaningful.
>
> Krishna Das, who was raised in Leicester in a Hindu Vaiṣṇava family, marries at University a Catholic woman who introduces him to aspects of the Catholic way of life. He continues to image Christ as an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, while he also wonders if there is a cognitive-experiential route to demonstrating the truth of the Chalcedonian statement that Jesus *is* the son of God.
>
> Margaret, who was raised in a Catholic family in Coventry, develops a deep interest in aspects of Advaita Vedānta. She begins to wonder if there are any cognitive grounds for claiming that Catholic spirituality is more truth-tracking than Advaitic spirituality.

While Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret are, of course, my fictive productions, they are not entirely fictitious either, for such individuals are, at least in some cosmopolitan locations across Western Europe and North America, perhaps more of a rule than an exception. (If an autobiographical intrusion be permitted, I am myself a hybrid of "Thomas" and "Krishna Das" – oriented more towards the former than the latter.) What is common to them is that some form of "*dual* religious belonging" is almost forced on them by existential turns at specific conjunctions. Also,

they seek some form of cognitive response to their spiritual dilemma – they want to *know* if there is an epistemic mechanism which will help them to understand which religious standpoint has a higher alethic content. Thus, even if all three individuals agree that it is logically *in*consistent to say that Christ and Viṣṇu are two "absolutes," or that the Advaitic ineffable and Christ are two "absolutes," and so on, they could yet retort: "To the extent that I do not know which 'absolute' is *more* truth-tracking, I do not clearly see which one pathway I should follow. Here I stand, in the in-between of dual participation, and I can do no other." However, the claim that reasoned demonstrations are absent in these scenarios would be strongly disputed both by Catholic apologists and by Hindu apologists who claim that they have developed systematic arguments to demonstrate the cognitive superiority of their own worldview.

Now: *is* there such a rational argument? Venturing gingerly into territory where angels (should) fear to tread, I can only state that I am not myself aware of the existence of an argument of the following type:

Premise 1: [a premise which is accepted by both sides]
Premise 2:
Premise 3:
Rule of inference: [a rule of inference which is accepted by both sides]
Conclusion.

Consider, for instance, the vast oceans of Christian missionary polemic that were directed against Hindu lifeforms in British India, and the Hindu responses, at times equally vituperative, to these missionary critiques. Each side – Hindu as well as Christian – claimed that they had conclusively demonstrated the cognitive-moral-spiritual superiority of their own standpoint. A logical analysis of their arguments indicates that they have the following formal outline:

(A)
Premise 1: The Bible is *the* word of God.
Premise 2:
Conclusion: Christianity is "the way, the truth, the life."
(B)
Premise 3: The Vedic scriptures are *the* pointer towards the ultimate reality.
Premise 4:
Conclusion: Advaita Vedānta is "the Religion to purify all religions."

In other words, both (A) and (B) are structured by modes of epistemic circularity, in which the most vital claim – Premise 1 or Premise 3 – is itself asserted not from "outside" but from "inside" the circle of faith. For those who are *already* Christians, Premise 1 is not a mere conceptual possibility but is the cognitive-spiritual foundation of their religious existence. Again, for those who are *already* Advaitins, Premise 3 is not a matter of contestation but is the very ground of their spiritual practice. Thus, as John Arapura notes: "As does

[Karl] Barth, [Advaita] Vedānta finds an *Archimedean* point outside reason from which to move, criticize, control, or even reject reason."[9] In other words, in Barthian theology and also in Advaita, one does not start by logically demonstrating the truth of Premise 1 or Premise 3; rather, one accepts them – with at least some minimal existential commitment – and goes on to do Christian theology or develop a form of Hindu theology. The logical dependence of rational exploration on scriptural foundations is vigorously expressed by Cornelius Van Til when he argues that "we cannot subject the authoritative pronouncement of Scripture about reality to the scrutiny of reason because it is reason itself that learns of its proper function from Scripture."[10] Therefore, the distinctive forms of theo-*logic* which structure Barthian doctrine and Advaita are not "externally" available for straightforward empirical confirmation or logical analysis but are to be "internally" appropriated from within the volitional subjectivities of existential commitment.

However, precisely here lies the question with anthropological-theological bite vis-à-vis the question of "dual religious *belonging*": how does one know precisely which "Archimedean point" to accept, receive, or acknowledge in framing one's religious orientations to the world? For Christians and Hindus who may have never encountered deep religious diversity – the social reality that other human beings who are reasonable, attentive, honest, truth-seeking, and sincere in their epistemic quests may have radically divergent conceptions of divinity – this epistemic circularity is usually not a matter of existential concern. However, for individuals such as Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret, this circularity, I suggest, is indeed existentially vexatious, for they have no straightforward epistemic means to *know* which worldview they should inhabit if they are trying to maximise truth in a world that is inhabited by individuals whom they acknowledge to be their epistemic peers. In this context, it is sometimes argued that the truth of Christianity is not perspicuous because if it were self-evident, human beings would not be able to exercise their moral freedom in responding to God.[11] Similarly, rejecting the possibility that the structures of a universal reason can lead, with logical ineluctability, to Christian truth, Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp argue: "We do not regard ourselves as offering 'knock-down arguments' against, or for, the claims of Christian orthodoxy. Our aim is not to talk 'all rational agents' into, or out of, belief in the most robust of Christian claims about the nature and significance of what occurred in the events surrounding the life of a certain ancient rabbi."[12] Precisely because the evidence is not logically coercive or

9 John G. Arapura, *Hermeneutical Essays on Vedāntic Topics* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986), 191.

10 Quoted in C. Stephen Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 19.

11 Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 209.

12 Philip Clayton and Steven Knapp, *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 22.

rationally compelling, the epistemic pathways of Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret are not logical entailments of some universally perspicacious statements but are "faith-full" adventures that are guided by what they take – reasonably – to be plausible, meaningful, and significant. Thus, the adjudication of religious disputes is hermeneutic rather than algorithmic because religious knowing is crucially shaped by the background presuppositions, convictions, and assumptions that people bring to a discussion.[13]

It is vital to note that the hermeneutic situation that we are describing here is quite unlike that of say, Marcus, a Dominican monk in 1450, who has occasional doubts about the existence of God. For Marcus, the existential choice is between two conceptual poles – either the *Christian God* or *atheism*. Marcus has, of course, heard about the gods of the pagans, the heretics, and the infidels, but those are not "live options" for him. For Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret, however, the situation is vastly more complicated, for they have to wrestle with the question not only of "*whether* God exists or not?" but also of "*which* divine reality – the Chalcedonian Christ or Viṣṇu or the Advaitic ineffable silence?" The point is not that Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret will always remain fixed in this in-between epistemic space – five years from today, perhaps Thomas will become a Jesuit, Krishna Das will receive initiation from a Vaiṣṇava guru, and Margaret will start living in an Advaita ashram. Yet, whichever way they go, their "*singular* belonging" will perhaps remain informed by a sense that our ultimate ontological commitments are not always cognitively perspicacious and constitute a dynamic space that can be characterised as an attitude of trustful acceptance. Thus, for instance, Thomas may receive with trust that the Gospels are not mere biographies but are sacred narratives of God's saving work in human history, just as Margaret may receive with trust that the Vedas are not simply poetic utterances but are divinely inspired words which are symbiotically intertwined with the deep structures of reality.

Now, when Thomas becomes a Jesuit, we could say that he *fully* belongs – not only is his affiliation to Catholicism endorsed at the highest level humanly possible (i.e. the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in Rome) but also he affiliates himself in multiple full-blooded senses to the existential-spiritual densities of Catholicism. Matters become far messier when we consider certain patterns of Indian Christianity on the ground: for instance, a study of a rural church in South India indicated that many Christians had a Hindu and a (baptismal) Christian name, kept images of household goddesses, often had spouses from Hindu backgrounds, and participated in a variety of Hindu and Muslim religious festivals. At a theological level, though they were often familiar with the narrative of Christ's birth and crucifixion, they were largely in the dark about his resurrection, the sacrificial significance of his atoning death, and the Trinity. They interpreted the incarnation of Christ in terms of *avatāras* like Kṛṣṇa and his death with the

13 Evans, *Faith Beyond Reason*, 122–23.

notion of ascetic self-denial, and they conceived of Christian salvation along the lines of Hindu *mokṣa*.[14]

Consider one such Indian Christian whom we will name "Amit Philip" – does Amit *belong* to a Christian worldview? From certain official perspectives – whether the doctrinal epicentre is Rome, Canterbury, or Edinburgh – Amit's doctrinal understanding may be ruled out as insufficiently developed and containing too many Hindu inflections. However, such an authoritative ruling would raise the crucial question of precisely how much doctrine-grounded understanding is required or expected a Christian. As Norman Anderson notes: "where in Scripture do we have the exact amount of knowledge required set out? For *assurance*, no doubt, knowledge is required, but for grace it is not so much knowledge as a right attitude towards God that matters."[15] Anderson's question, in turn, points to the delicate topic over which many rivers of ink, and sadly blood, have been spilled – *who* should, or could, determine if a particular Christian has the "right attitude" that is arguably necessary for full belonging to a Christian community?

Belonging in religiously diverse milieus

To return to Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret, while their spiritual experiments are not representative of the whole socio-religious spectrum of contemporary Britain, a vital question is whether individuals who possess a sufficient awareness of religious diversity are themselves being rational in belonging to a "*singular* religious worldview." The key debate in the circles of "Reformed epistemology" is whether such awareness should lower the epistemic status of belief in the truths of Christianity. Alvin Plantinga argues that he seeks to demonstrate not the truth of Christianity but rather that *if* Christian belief is true, it is warranted, where "warrant" is what distinguishes a mere true belief from knowledge. He argues that even if a Christian is unable to present an argument which will demonstrate that the other religious traditions are false or will convince the members of those traditions that a Christian position is true, she is not herself irrational or violating any epistemic duties. Plantinga is aware that his epistemological analyses have not settled the truth question: "But *is* this true? This is the really important question. And here we pass beyond the competence of philosophy, whose main competence, in this area, is to clear away certain objections, impedances, and obstacles to Christian belief."[16] Plantinga nevertheless argues that the views of non-Christians are not as epistemically well placed as those of Christians because the latter might possess the *sensus divinitatis* ("sense of divinity") or have received a

14 P.Y. Luke and John B. Carman, *Village Christians and Hindu Culture: Study of a Rural Church in Andhra Pradesh, South India* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 165–89.

15 Norman Anderson, *Christianity and Comparative Religion* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977), 99.

16 Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 499.

special grace and so on. Several other Christian theologians have argued that the ambit of human reason extends to the establishment of the intra-systemic coherence and the existential significance of a Christian worldview. Reflecting on his conversion to Christianity from a form of Buddhism, Paul Williams articulates such a view: "I am not going to argue that I know that God exists, I know the resurrection took place, and I know Catholicism is true. I am going to argue only that I can rationally believe these things."[17]

However, even if the existence of other religious traditions does not provide an immediate falsifier to Christian truth which remains rationally defensible, the central question is whether such arguments point to the God of Jesus Christ or to some other divinity such as the Hindu God Kṛṣṇa. As Roger Trigg notes, Plantinga's move from a sense of divinity to the *Christian* God seems to be "very short," for a "predisposition to religious belief appears to support the existence, both now and in the past, of myriad forms of religion, and does not seem to support a fully formed belief in the one Creator God of Christian belief."[18] Thus, from within the Christian doxastic or belief-forming practice, an individual can claim to have an internal reason to believe that this practice is sufficiently reliable. However, the adherents of other religious traditions will have analogous internal reasons to claim that *their* doxastic practices are sufficiently reliable. According to William Alston, the "maximally direct approach" in such scenarios of religious diversity is to attempt to demonstrate the truth of one's own beliefs and the falsity of the beliefs of others. He points out, however, that this approach will have to proceed through considerations that are shared by all parties: "For if the Christian tries to show that her beliefs are true, and that Hindu beliefs are false, by appealing to God's self-revelation in the Bible, we are, it would seem, no further forward."[19]

These debates relating to the epistemic reach of reason are reflected in Paul Moser's call for "personifying evidence" for the existence of (the Christian) God. On the one hand, Moser does not entirely reject the notion that Christians can appeal to "evidence" in speaking to non-Christians about the reality of Christ but argues, on the other hand, that this "evidence" is not universally accessible to dispassionate observers. Such "evidence" is available only to human beings who are entering into personal relationships with a morally perfect God and becoming attuned to the divine will that non-coercively transforms their wills.[20] More concretely, Moser presents the following argument from the ongoing volitional

17 Paul Williams, *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 18.

18 Roger Trigg, *Religious Diversity: Philosophical and Political Dimensions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 75.

19 William Alston, "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, eds. Philip Quinn and Kevin Meeker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 194.

20 Paul K. Moser, *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 40.

transformation of self-directed human beings to the existence of God (henceforth VTG):

1 Necessarily, if a human person is offered and receives the transformative gift, then this is the result of the authoritative power of a divine X of thoroughgoing forgiveness, fellowship in perfect love, worthiness of worship, and triumphant hope (namely, God).
2 I have been offered, and have willingly received, the transformative gift.
3 Therefore, God exists.[21]

Now, the crucial point for our argument is whether VTG has any analogues in Hindu religious systems, such that their adherents too might develop a parallel epistemological account for the existence of a Hindu divinity. Raising this question, Moser responds as follows:

> The answer is clear: *only if* the religion in question offers a perfectly loving God who has intervened noncoercively to redeem people by divine grace rather than by human earning. . . . If some religions do offer the kind of perfectly loving God in question, then we may be talking about the same God *under different names*.[22]

While Moser does not follow up this line of investigation, we will highlight some strands of Hindu religiosity which possess resonant parallels to Premises 1 and 2 in VTG.

A key theme in these strands is that by cultivating devotional love (*bhakti*) towards the supremely personal reality, who is Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa, individuals begin to overcome their egoistic encirclements in the domain of rebirths. Many of these *bhakti* streams are integrally connected to the Vedāntic patterns of scriptural exegesis, which were developed by key teachers such as Rāmānuja (1017–1137 CE), Vallabha (1479–1531 CE), and others. The motif of passionate *bhakti* is echoed throughout the metaphysical, experiential, and devotional aspects of the scriptural worlds of Vallabha. According to his Vedāntic system known as "pure (*śuddha*) non-dualism (*advaita*)," the Lord Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate reality, and is omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, self-dependent, and devoid of all empirical defects.[23] The Vallabha tradition accepts the theory of "immutable transformation" (*avikṛta-pariṇāma*) according to which just as gold, without suffering any intrinsic change, becomes fashioned into different types of ornaments, so too the immutable Lord, without undergoing any essential transformation, manifests the transcendental aspects of reality (*sat*), consciousness (*cit*), and bliss (*ānanda*) in the finite selves

21 Ibid., 200.
22 Ibid., 229.
23 Roma Chaudhuri, *Ten Schools of the Vedānta, Part I* (Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati University, 1973), 127.

(*jīva*) and the physical world (*jagat*).[24] The "non-dualism" between the divine reality and the finite world is analogised by Vallabha through the following relationship: the insentient world and the individual self emerge from the Lord like sparks proceeding from fire.[25]

Regarding the crucial theme of the relation between the Lord and the world, Vallabha states that the Lord's production of the world is not actuated by any purpose that he seeks to fulfil, for scriptural texts indicate that all of the Lord's desires are fulfilled. The only purpose that underlies this production is the Lord's non-necessitated and exuberant sport (*līlā*). Through *māyā-śakti*, a power that is real and under the control of his will (*icchā*), Kṛṣṇa conceals a part of himself and becomes the insentient world. Because of its spiritual ignorance (*avidyā*), the empirical self forgets that its true nature is to be a part of Kṛṣṇa and render selfless devotional service (*sevā*) to Kṛṣṇa. However, through his mercy (*kṛpā*) and grace (*anugraha*), the Lord has revealed himself as the supreme lover of the cowherd women (*gopīs*) who are passionately devoted to him. Vallabha argues that the reason why the Lord, who is perfectly full, should thus graciously engage in cosmic sport with the *gopīs* is that they are his friends (*suhṛda*).[26] Vallabha viewed pride as a dangerous delusion which takes human beings away from the Lord, and instead put forward constant *sevā* of the Lord, singing his praises, and listening to the accounts of his *līlā* as the means through which they can overcome the pride that separates them from their Lord.

A vital theme in the devotional life of the Vallabha tradition is the difference between two types of liberation. The *puṣṭi* type is independent of any empirical means: through the power of his intrinsic nature, the Lord himself brings individuals to him. Such individuals have to depend entirely on the "unmerited" *anugraha* of their Lord: "Only by the grace of Shrī Kṛṣṇa does one receive the grace of Shrī Kṛṣṇa: nothing that one may do can bring that grace."[27] In short, for Vallabha, human subjectivities, which are transformed by the grace of Kṛṣṇa, constitute the personal medium through which Kṛṣṇa becomes progressively expressed in the lives of the devotees. When human emotions, qualities, and dispositions are directed towards Kṛṣṇa alone as their ultimate object and the senses are purified through service to Kṛṣṇa, deep levels of intimacy develop between the devotees and their Lord.[28] The centrality of non-coercive grace in thus effacing human egoism is highlighted by a commentator called Bālakṛṣṇa, who defines *puṣṭi* as the type of devotion which is caused by the special grace of the Lord, and which is characterised by the absence of desire for any reward other than the intrinsic

24 Mrudula Marfatia, *The philosophy of Vallabhācārya* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967), 55.

25 Shridhar Tryambak Pathak, *Anubhasyam* (Poona: Aryabhusan Press, 1921), 154.

26 James Redington, *Vallabhacarya on the Love Games of Krsna* (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 479.

27 Richard Barz, *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya* (Faridabad: Thomson Press, 1976), 87.

28 Jeffrey R. Timm, "The Celebration of Emotion: Vallabha's Ontology of Affective Experience," *Philosophy East and West* 41 (1991): 59–75.

nature of the Lord. He distinguishes between four types of *puṣṭi* devotion and states that those who cultivate the fourth type are the best of the Lord's devotees: they remain engaged, with deep love, in acts such as serving the Lord, singing his glories, and so on. All ends are attained through the grace of the Lord, and not through conscious efforts of the devotee, which are an obstacle since they are associated with the sense of egoity.[29]

Now, the key question is whether these spiritual transformations of human beings which are centred on Kṛṣṇa, the God of perfect love, conform to Moser's Premise 1. Certain aspects of the divine attributes of "authoritative power," "fellowship in perfect love," and "worthiness of worship" can be hermeneutically resituated within Hindu devotional contexts – Kṛṣṇa is the supremely adorable transcendental Lord who delights and in-spires worldly individuals through his gracious activities such as his *līlā* of self-revelation. For those who are helpless and attached to sinful straying away from God (*pāpa*) and are totally lacking in wisdom, patience, devotion, and other dispositions, Vallabha says that Kṛṣṇa alone is their refuge (*gati*).[30] Some of these devotional practices, which are located in conceptual universes analogous to VTG, are highlighted in a text called the *Nārada-bhakti-sūtra*. Here, *bhakti* is said to be generated through the companionship of saintly people, and this fellowship is gained by the grace (*kṛpayā*) of the Lord.[31] The devotees overcome the world and help others to overcome the world as well (*tārayati*).[32] They converse with one another with a choking voice, with their hairs standing on end and with tears, and they purify (*pāvayanti*) their families as well as the earth.[33]

From Moser's perspective, of course, what is soteriologically absent in these Hindu devotional descriptions is the crucial Christ-event. For Moser, Premise 1 is – implicitly – connected to the doctrine of the atoning sacrificial death of Christ, which has no immediate analogues on Hindu theological landscapes.[34] The densely interwoven mesh of the doctrinal threads of sin, salvation, and atonement, which Moser argues is distinctive of – or rather unique to – the Christian gospel, cannot be neatly transposed into Hindu devotional traditions with their own complex set of metaphysical presuppositions, experiential valences, and ritual significations. Moser might even object to my translation of the Sanskrit *anugraha* as "grace" on the grounds that it is reserved as an Augustinian-Thomist soteriological concept which is immovably moored to the doctrine of

29 Satya Narayan Mishra, *Śuddhādvaitamārtaṇḍaḥ* (Varanasi: Varanasi Sanskrit University, 1966), 86–90.

30 James Redington, *The Grace of Lord Krishna: The Sixteen Verse-Treatises (Soḍaśagranthāḥ) of Vallabhacharya* (New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2000), 110.

31 Nandalal Sinha, *Bhaktisūtras of Nārada* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998), 20.

32 Ibid., 23.

33 Ibid., 29.

34 Paul K. Moser, "Sin and Salvation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, eds. Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 141.

the atonement. However, if such an objection were to be pursued systematically, it would imply that I should also not use English words such as "Lord," "pride," "mercy," "fellowship," "devotion," "love," "refuge," and "patience," for these words too have distinctively Christian soteriological valences. Moreover, it would raise the question as to why Christian doctrine gets to set the hermeneutic ground rules regarding which English words can be reworked by those who are writing about, or themselves envisioning, patterns of Hindu theology.

In short, the answer to the most magnificent question as to whether Kṛṣṇa *is* Christ but "under a different name" – or vice versa – will depend partly on how tightly the redemption of humanity from worldly egoistic bondage is tied specifically to the atonement. Thus, in our attempt to highlight the existential ambiguities that shape the religious orientations of Thomas, Krishna Das, and Margaret, we have arrived at two sets of "personifying evidence" of a spiritual transformation from egoistic absorption to selfless love, and the fundamental question that has haunted us throughout this essay returns – is human reason epistemically robust to adjudicate such ontological-experiential debates across two internally complex configurations of theological doctrines?

Conclusion

The academic debates on the possibility of "dual religious belonging" are often polarised between two groups – the theologians and the anthropologists. Thus, the former study textual materials and discuss theological possibilities relating to whether or not the ultimate reality across the world's religious traditions is ontologically the same, while the latter investigate concrete anthropological styles of religious belonging in diverse sociocultural locations. I have suggested that for a proper understanding of both the theological possibilities and the anthropological actualities of "dual religious belonging," one needs to combine resources from these disciplinary matrices. Thus, I have argued that while from a philosophical-theological perspective, "*dual* religious belonging" is conceptually incoherent, from some anthropological perspectives, it is "*singular* religious belonging" which could become – or perhaps has already become – existentially implausible across various locations in Western Europe and Anglo-American milieus. My claim that "dual religious belonging" cannot be defined, especially if we are looking for a definition involving necessary and sufficient conditions, is partly reflected in some of the other contributions to this volume. Thus, Gavin D'Costa characterises Manu, who adheres to magisterial teachings and has also integrated Hindu cultural values into Christian living, as a "*soteriological exclusivist* dual belonger." Again, Jeffery D. Long points out that the pluralism of Ramakrishna, in whose religious vision there are multiple pathways leading to the infinite God, is shaped by a *singular* commitment – to pluralism itself.

Since I have been working with somewhat hypothetical examples, here are some concrete historical figures. The first is a remarkable soldier called Charles Stuart who, in his tract *Vindication of the Hindoos* (1808), systematically opposed the missionary denunciations of Hinduism as a heap of idolatrous errors. Hinduism,

he claimed, was a sophisticated religion, and indeed, its "pious men," the Brahmins, had developed certain concepts such as the immortality of the soul before Christianity had arrived. At the end of the day, however, it is difficult to know where to place Stuart on a Hindu-Christian continuum: "That Stuart was not a Hindu, but that he also evaded the clear distinction between Hindus and Christians, became evident after his death. He was buried as a Christian in Park Street Cemetery, Calcutta. On his grave a tomb in the shape of a Hindu temple, with Indian sculptures from his collection, was erected."[35]

More recently, while recounting his experiences during the "Hindu-Christian" funeral service of a Hindu friend who had married a Christian woman, the Indian Christian theologian Stanley Samartha writes that this gentleman had promised his father that he would not "betray the faith of his forefathers." After his body was cremated and his ashes brought home, there was first a Christian service which was "*formal*, orderly, well structured, and with the minister in his robe," followed by the Hindu rite which was "*informal*, less rigid, with hardly any words uttered and no priest being present."[36] Reflecting on how his Hindu friend had brought together, even if only for a few hours, both his Hindu and his Christian friends, Samartha writes: "Immediately after the rites each group went away separately, perhaps never to meet again in the near future. . . . Did he live as a Christian and die as a Hindu or did he live as a Hindu and die as a Christian? Who knows?"[37] Perhaps, as the German Lutheran theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests, such questions can only be left to the ultimate reality: "When a Hindu or Sikh prays to God, how can we know that in his intention it is the same God we [Christians] worship? Even in the case of a pious Muslim this is not clear, because his way of turning to God is informed by his belief in Muhammad. . . . Is it nevertheless the same God? This is a question to be decided by God, not us."[38]

Finally, consider this theological meditation:

> To attain the supreme reality, there is no specific method or means. The divine is self-expressed, and divine mercy itself is the only means for this attainment. Simply put, unceasing prayer to God is the true means.

Those who are primed to read these words from Christian perspectives will possibly take them as a VTG-expression of the *sola gratia* motif. They are, in fact, my translations from the Bengali of Bijoy Krishna Goswami (1841–1899), who was writing in the context of some Vaiṣṇava movements which were partly directed

35 Jörg Fisch, "A Solitary Vindicator of the Hindus: The Life and Writings of General Charles Stuart (1757/8–1828)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4 (1985): 53.

36 Stanley J. Samartha, "A Hindu Christian Funeral," in *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*, eds. Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, Vol. 1 (London: SPCK, 1993), 158–62, 160.

37 Ibid., 162.

38 Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: The Problem of a Theology of the World Religions," in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 103.

against Christian missionaries. We can be quite certain that Jesus Christ was not the name of the supreme reality whom Goswami had in mind in composing these statements about the divine mercy (*kṛpā*).[39] Therefore, the question as to whether Goswami's prayers reached Christ or Kṛṣṇa is perhaps one that we should silently leave for now to the divine reality – till we get to the end.

References

Abhishiktananda, Swami. *Hindu – Christian Meeting Point: Within the Cave of the Heart*. New Delhi: ISPCK, 1969.

Alston, William. "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God." In *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity*, edited by Philip Quinn and Kevin Meeker, 193–207. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Anderson, Norman. *Christianity and Comparative Religion*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1977.

Arapura, John G. *Hermeneutical Essays on Vedāntic Topics*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986.

Barz, Richard. *The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya*. Faridabad: Thomson Press, 1976.

Carman, John, and Vasudha Narayanan. *The Tamil Veda: Piḷḷan's interpretation of the Tiruvāymoḻi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Chaudhuri, Roma. *Ten Schools of the Vedānta, Part I*. Calcutta: Rabindra Bharati University, 1973.

Clayton, Philip, and Steven Knapp. *The Predicament of Belief: Science, Philosophy, Faith*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Cornille, Catherine. "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23 (2003): 43–49.

du Boulay, Shirley. *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Dulles, Avery, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Evans, C. Stephen. *Faith Beyond Reason*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998.

Fisch, Jörg. "A Solitary Vindicator of the Hindus: The Life and Writings of General Charles Stuart (1757/8–1828)." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 4 (1985): 35–57.

Goswami, Bijoy Krishna. *Yog-sādhan*. Dhaka: Gopinath Balak, 1886.

Luke, P.Y., and John B. Carman. *Village Christians and Hindu Culture: Study of a Rural Church in Andhra Pradesh, South India*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1968.

Marfatia, Mrudula. *The Philosophy of Vallabhācārya*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1967.

Mishra, Satya Narayan. *Śuddhādvaitamārtaṇḍaḥ*. Varanasi: Varanasi Sanskrit University, 1966.

Moser, Paul K. *The Evidence for God: Religious Knowledge Reexamined*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

———. "Sin and Salvation." In *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology*, edited by Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, 136–51. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

39 Bijoy Krishna Goswami, *Yog-sādhan* (Dhaka: Gopinath Balak, 1886), 2.

Panikkar, Raimon. *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. "Religious Pluralism and Conflicting Truth Claims: The Problem of a Theology of the World Religions." In *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, edited by Gavin D'Costa, 96–106. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.

Pathak, Shridhar Tryambak. *Anubhasyam*. Poona: Aryabhusan Press, 1921.

Phan, Peter C. "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church." *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 495–519.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli, ed. *The Bhagavadgītā*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963.

Redington, James. *Vallabhacarya on the Love Games of Krsna*. New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983.

———. *The Grace of Lord Krishna: The Sixteen Verse-Treatises (Soḍaśagranthāḥ) of Vallabhacharya*. New Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2000.

Samartha, Stanley J. "A Hindu Christian Funeral." In *Readings in Indian Christian Theology*, edited by Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah and Cecil Hargreaves, 158–62, vol. 1. London: SPCK, 1993.

Sinha, Nandalal. *Bhaktisūtras of Nārada*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998.

Timm, Jeffrey R. "The Celebration of Emotion: Vallabha's Ontology of Affective Experience." *Philosophy East and West* 41 (1991): 59–75.

Trigg, Roger. *Religious Diversity: Philosophical and Political Dimensions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Williams, Paul. *The Unexpected Way: On Converting from Buddhism to Catholicism*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002.

5 Considering the case of Catholic-Hindu dual belonging from a magisterial and dogmatic point of view[1]

Gavin D'Costa

Introduction

One might approach this topic from existing literature of dual belonging, field work on the phenomenon, phenomenology, social cultural analysis, postcolonial theory, etc., or as I have chosen, from the viewpoint of Catholic dogmatics.[2] If this approach is criticised as being from above and somewhat sectarian, I would say, the "above" has been generated over a long period from "below"; and that every approach is "sectarian" in various accepted presuppositions that are not universal. Further, multidisciplinary approaches are more likely to be fruitful, and since several key dual belongers in this area were and are Catholics, then there is even more need for this kind of contribution, such as it is.[3]

1 I am grateful for the use of an earlier published version of this paper which has been revised and edited for this chapter: Gavin D'Costa, "Assessing Catholic-Buddhist Dual Belonging in the Light of the Catholic Magisterium," in *Philosophical and Theological Responses to Syncretism*, eds. Mika Vähäkangas and Patrik Fridlund (Leiden; Boston: BRILL, 2017), 104–62. I am grateful to Dr Daniel Soars for his suggestions on how to improve the paper and to Professors Catherine Cornille & Peter Tyler, who commented on an initial draft.

2 For a cultural-sociological approach in this collection, see Daniel Soars' piece. While that approach may not entail dissonance with my approach, it sometimes does. Soars, in effect, seems to deconstruct the magisterium's definitions and subjects them to "authorities" outside of the tradition (cultural-sociological forms of analysis). Such postcolonial discourses then become the "magisterium" to guide us through these thickets, or to lose us in dense jungle.

3 For some earlier reflections on Bede Griffiths, Swami Abhishiktananda, Raimundo Panikkar, Jyoti Sahi, and Indian Christian theology, see my "Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal," *Modern Theology* 1, no. 2 (1985): 131-48; "Inculturation: India and Other Religions," *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 121-48; *Sexing the Trinity: Gender, Culture and the Divine* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 150–93. See also Catherine Cornille, *The Guru in Indian Catholicism. Ambiguity or Opportunity of Inculturation* (Leuven: Peeters Press and Eerdmans, 1991) for the complex patterns in the messy reality of first-generation pioneers compared to the conceptual cleanness of my ideal type "Manu." The second generation of Indian Catholic Hindu encounter takes on a very different shape in part because of (a) local Indian inculturation rather than European inculturation in the expression of Christianity; (b) the importance of liberation theology to the later generation of Indian theologians; (c) a far more critical attitude towards Hinduism due to the caste system and Indian Christian low caste converts (like myself some generations back. I'm originally

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-5

Let me briefly define "dual belonging" as I shall employ it, acknowledging multiple ways of proceeding with this definition.[4] Basically, there are objective and subjective aspects such that formally belonging to two religious communities who both publicly accept such dual "belonging" would be a maximal case of objective belonging. Usually, people just belong formally and publicly to one community and claim an identification or sympathy or connection with another. This is particularly the case when one enters a community through birth, rather than adult conversion. The subjective aspect denotes the interior landscape of the person, whereby they may not formally belong to either community objectively, but feel they belong to both at the affective level. Since I am dealing with formal objective belonging to Roman Catholicism as part of dual belonging with Hinduism, the belonging to Hinduism would then work along a spectrum between only subjective belonging and at the other end of the scale: full objective membership of Hinduism (acknowledging that this can take varying forms from requiring birth into the community, to initiation and conversion into the community.

I shall present my case in cumulative steps of argument. First, I will ask whether there is any form of dual belonging presently legitimated by the Roman Catholic Church. The answer, which is perhaps surprising, is that there is. This should alert us to two things. There are limits to the application of such an answer, but that such an answer is possible, might mean that the case of Catholic-Hindu dual belonging requires careful consideration. I then consider the formal magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church to see what light they might throw on the question of dual belonging. Since they never address these questions explicitly, I assemble an answer through implication from established teachings. I then apply this to a semi-fictitious Hindu-Catholic dual belonger called Manu. In trying to see how Manu could operate within the legitimate boundaries set by doctrinal teachings (by implication), one sees a form of Hindu-Catholic dual belonging emerge. Manu's form of dual belonging also stands as a critique of a number of great pioneers in this area. Finally, I consider whether Hinduism provides distinct and unique challenges when considering dual belonging. The answer there is both yes and no.

---

an outcaste fisher clan originating from Goa). The line between radical inculturation and dual belonging is thin but does exist. See for example: Alexander Henn, *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014) which explores shared ritual practices without dual belonging. Finally, I have neglected to attend to various politically militant forms of Hinduism which are inimical to Christianity and the figure of "Manu" belongs squarely to the first generation as outlined previously. This has weaknesses, and liberation theology approaches of the second generation, called "Karl" may not be comfortable with my modelling. One has to start somewhere as an inroad into the question.

4 See the classic work in this area: Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002). Cornille's definitions in the introduction are most helpful.

Part I: is any form of dual belonging legitimated by the Catholic Church at present?

What of Jews who have become Catholic and remain religiously observant Jews and also wish to be united fully with the Catholic Church? These are called "Hebrew Catholics." They exist and have a website and special ecclesial permission for their existence. They would constitute a form of objective dual belonging if and when Jewish communities accept their Jewish religious identity as intact. As yet, this is rare and certainly not the case for any Orthodox Jewish communities. Complicating matters, while the Catholic Church accepts their "Jewish" identity, this can take on the form of ethnic descent alone or someone who is also observant – and this can be in varying ways.

The terms *ecclesia ex gentibus* and *ecclesia ex circumcision* are used by the Catholic Committee for Religious Relations with the Jews in 2015, showing a theological awareness of this dual belonging in the earliest Christian communities.[5] This statement has no formal doctrinal authority but was co-authored by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith as well. It is significant:

> The first Christians were Jews; as a matter of course, they gathered as part of the community in the Synagogue, they observed the dietary laws, the Sabbath and the requirement of circumcision, while at the same time confessing Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah sent by God for the salvation of Israel and the entire human race. With Paul the "Jewish Jesus movement" definitively opens up other horizons and transcends its purely Jewish origins. Gradually his concept came to prevail, that is, that a non-Jew did not have to become first a Jew in order to confess Christ. In the early years of the Church, therefore, there were the so-called Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians, the *ecclesia ex circumcisione* and the *ecclesia ex gentibus*, one Church originating from Judaism, the other from the Gentiles, who however together constituted the one and only Church of Jesus Christ. (15)

What is important here is the importance of these two dimensions, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, who together in their difference constitute one body of Christ. This point is reiterated later in the document: "It is and remains a qualitative definition of the Church of the New Covenant that it consists of Jews and Gentiles, even if the quantitative proportions of Jewish and Gentile Christians may initially give a different impression." (43) Hebrew Catholics are germane to my concern precisely because they wish to be Catholic and are already Jewish/Hebrew.[6] They have "problems" with parts of the Jewish community, especially

5 See Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *"The Gifts and the Calling of God are Irrevocable" (Rom 11:29) – A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations* (10 December 2015). www.christianunity.va.

6 For a basic introduction, see their website: www.hebrewcatholic.net/ and their founder's book: Elias Friedman, *Jewish Identity* (New York: Miriam Press, 1987).

as they see themselves as having a special charism for witness.[7] However, they have the right to be called dual belongers on the ground that they both practise and are religiously observant Jews (in varying degrees – and sometimes within observant Jewish communities), as well as believing and practising religiously observant Catholics (no doubt in varying degrees but are very orthodox in their Catholic beliefs and practices from my own experience). They accept the normative creeds of the Latin Western tradition. They have been granted special privileges by the US Bishops and Roman hierarchy to continue their Jewish religious practices, just as Jesus did, although his privilege and authority did not require the bishops' permission.

During the Council, when these matters were being debated, the question of Jewish conversion to Christ being a form of self-destruction (as it eradicated their Jewish identity) came alive in the famous remark made by Rabbi Abraham Heschel. He vividly opposed Christian mission: "I am ready to go to Auschwitz any time, if faced with the alternative of conversion or death."[8] Hebrew Catholics believe that this alternative – loss of Jewish identity OR conversion to Christ – is a false one. One of the founders of the Hebrew Catholics, Elias Friedman, a convert Catholic priest, passionately argued that the roots of this dual identity/belonging were to be found in Christ and the early Jewish ecclesia.[9] Because of this double belonging, Friedman argues that Hebrew Catholics are in a unique position to give witness to the Church that it had lost its roots within Judaism and to witness to the Jewish people that by following Christ they do not face self-extinction. Friedman writes:

> If the existence of a Hebrew-Catholic community demonstrates to the Jews that the official Church does not intend to bring about the destruction of Jewry by assimilation, that would be a great gain for the Church. If the existence of a Hebrew-Catholic community should facilitate the admission of Jewry, the gain should be laid to the account of divine providence.[10]

It is worth noting that traditional Jews like traditional Hindus are usually what they are through birth, whereas becoming a Muslim or Christian, while including the possibility of being born into such a family does not see formal membership

7 Friedman, *Jewish Identity*, 93. Most Jews regard Hebrew Catholics as apostates or heretics. Some believe that they should be denied all rights of being Jewish, such as the law of return – including the official law of the State of Israel. They are looked at with greater suspicion than Jews who may also be Buddhists or atheists as the history of Christian hostility and persecution has been so severe. The issue here is who formally defines "Judaism" and who has the authority to define who belongs and does not. The internal dissension within "Judaism" makes this all the more complicated, when some Jews refuse the legitimacy of other Jews – let alone the disturbing group of Christian Jews, Messianic Jews – or let alone Hebrew Catholics.

8 *Herald Tribune*, 3 September 1964; then headlines in *Time* magazine, 11 September 1964.

9 Friedman, *Jewish Identity*.

10 Ibid., 93.

as requiring to be born into the community. Hence, there is a tighter relationship between religion and culture in Hinduism and Judaism, but even there, the cultural forms can be diverse and conflictual between different groups. Similarly, the relationship between religion and culture is complex such that a hundred years ago, if you were born in Southern Ireland, you would likely be a Roman Catholic and continue to be even if as an adult you had no sense of the beliefs within this religion. Nevertheless, in both Judaism and Hinduism, there are "missionary" groups that do not stipulate that outsiders must be born into the religion to become members. In Catholicism, the other side of the equation here, membership is normally through baptism (very often as an infant) and then through confirmation, as an adult renewing the vows that were made on behalf of "you" as an infant. In Catholicism, if an adult converts to Catholicism, they undergo both rites of baptism and confirmation. Can Hebrew Catholics form a basis for thinking about Hindu Catholics?

Part II: objections to my analogical starting point

One objection would be that Judaism has a *sui generis* status within Christian salvation history because the "Old Testament" is regarded as sacred scripture. Hinduism, which is the subject of our concern here, does not have this status. Hence, to use the Hebrew Catholics as an example of dual belonging depends on a *sui generis* case, not one that is applicable to say Swami Abhishiktananda, a famous Catholic Hindu figure.[11] Consider this speculative scenario for a moment. If people who were previously Hindu also became Catholics and kept many of their religious practices intact in the process, arguing that these were preparatory rites and scriptures and so on, that had led them to their Christian discipleship, would this not be an *analogous* case to the Hebrew Catholics? The answer is probably both yes and no. No, because of the differences due to the *sui generis* status of Israel's scripture and covenant. Yes, because in both instances, God is preparing a community for the fullness of his self-gift in Christ. No, because in Hinduism, there may be more formidable discontinuities than the discontinuities with Judaism. Yes, because the goal of both preparatory journeys would be Christ in a united ecclesia. Analogies, by their nature, are always limited and shouldn't be pushed too hard.

Another objection to my argument is that there is nothing within Judaism that is intrinsically incompatible with Christianity as Christianity sees itself as a natural growth out of biblical Judaism, whereas the case is quite different with Hinduism. Again, the objection has much truth to it as the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – all have monotheism in common, which allows for a common basis. This is evident in Vatican II.[12] This is not true with Hinduism

11 See his classic: *Saccidananda: A Christian Approach to Advaitic Experience* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1974).

12 This is the assumption of *Lumen Gentium* 16 and *Nostra Aetate*, 3–4. It is contentious whether the Council embraced the idea of "Abrahamic religions," but later popes certainly employ the phrase, although its precise meaning is unclear.

and many Asian religions. There are two responses to this objection: first, whose "Judaism" or "Hinduism" do we mean when we speak of incompatibility? All religions, including "Christianity" are internally diverse and sometimes internally conflictual. The same holds true of Judaism and Hinduism. Various Orthodox Jews believe that modernity marks a serious break in the unity of the *halakha* (religious practices), while some progressive Jewish movements have dispensed with *halakha* altogether. Likewise, in Hinduism, some forms see others as invalid or grievously deficient.[13] Some forms of Hinduism, in their eschewal of metaphysics, cannot be compatible in the assumed areas of metaphysical difference: the existence of God, karma, the status of creation, the nature of moksha, and so on. More metaphysical forms of Hinduism may be compatible, but only after one is clear that when terms are used such as God, both traditions are referring to the same entity with the same characteristics. This must be carefully worked out by specialist representatives of each tradition, conversant with the language and its traditions of employment.

The objections are serious, and I do not wish to push the analogy, but I think it should be developed to see where it goes. All that follows has the proviso, that Judaism's special *sui generis* nature cannot be denied and that what is argued below does not address the question whether "revelation" actually exists in Hinduism as it does in Jewish scriptures, called the Old Testament, by Christians.

Part III: some magisterial teachings to help theologically develop dual belonging as applicable more widely than Hebrew Catholics

I propose that there are three key teachings that must be upheld from Catholic doctrinal teaching. If one does this and is a Catholic-Hindu dual belonger, then successful dual belonging has been doctrinally achieved. I have chosen these as they are constitutive for Catholic identity as defined by the official Catholic teaching authority: the magisterium (teaching office), expressed either by a Church Council or by the pope, speaking with his teaching authority explicitly specified. If the pope were to claim Chelsea football team the greatest football team in England, he would have no authority in claiming this as it does not derive from scripture (as far as I know) and thus Catholics could disagree. However, if he spoke *ex cathedra* or through a papal encyclical concerned with doctrine or in an ecumenical Council, Catholics would be required to read, reflect, and assent in mind and will, unless their conscience forbids it – but they would also have to be diligent that their conscience was properly formed. In reality, we know that few Catholics read these documents but that is the formal presuppositions of this paper.

13 See Deepak Sarma, "Madhva, Dialogue and Discernment," in *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

The first *de fide* teaching to begin with is that there is no salvation outside the Church[14] (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), which is taught continuously, with three qualifications.[15] *De fide* status indicates this teaching is a precondition of authentic and full Catholic faith for those who have the capabilities of appropriate intellectual assent. Denial of this, while being a Catholic, indicates heresy. I will draw on two further teachings later. This first teaching, no salvation outside the Church, has been reiterated by the Second Vatican Council and taught over nearly 1,900 years in differing contexts: starting with the Bible, various key fathers in patristic times, and entering the Conciliar tradition at Florence.[16] It has been reiterated since Vatican II at encyclical and dicastery levels.[17]

In a positive sense, this magisterial teaching indicates two interrelated claims: first, that salvation comes through Christ's atoning death (understood through a variety of models) and that without Christ, original sin and the devil have power over fallen humans. In his death, Christ overcomes sin, death, and the devil. This means that salvation cannot be other than from Christ both causally (ontologically) and historically (through the history of salvation staring with Adam and continuing through Abraham, Moses and the people of Israel). Second, the Church is understood as the sacramental presence of Christ in the world (through a variety of models), so while the Church is not Christ in terms of numerical identity, there is an inseparable relation between the two. One model, deriving from St Paul, states that the Church is Christ's body, of which Christ is its head. Aquinas is key here as he is employed by Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium* 16 (note 18) – in the article dealing with non-Christian religions.[18] The teaching thus means: Christ and his Church are the necessary means of salvation. It has not been defined whether this is a conditional or absolute necessity, but at the Council, the *relatio* on the matter indicates it is a necessity of means and not of precept.[19] The *relatio* has no formal teaching status, but at least frames the intention when a teaching is delivered.[20] Hence, Christ and the Church are the means of salvation.

Lest this be misunderstood, let me address misunderstandings of what is claimed. This sacramental salvific role of the Church does not mean that the

14 When I use a capital for "Church" I denote the extra-sociological empirical element related to the claims of the holiness of the Church through Christ's presence. (See *Lumen Gentium* 8, 14.)

15 See Johann Finisterhölzl, "Theological Notes," in *Encyclopaedia of Theology. The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (London: Burns & Oates, 1981, 1975), 1678–85.

16 The history of this teaching is traced in Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992).

17 For example, Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor Hominis* (1969); Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (2000); *Catholic Catechism* (1994), 846–48.

18 See my, *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 83–84, 90–99, 144–46, for a discussion of the key texts of Aquinas.

19 See Aloys Grillmeier, "Commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," in *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler, vol. 1 (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 153–85, 175.

20 The *relatio* is the formal commentary on the draft document presented to the Council Fathers and is meant to help them understand the text they are voting on.

Church is full of saints. It is full of sinners (including buggering bishops, paedophile priests, and licentious laity just to name some alliterating tragic sexual sins). The objective means of salvation are to be found in the sacraments, not the members of the church. Further, the positive nature of the teaching is emphasised in Vatican II through applying *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* only to those who know the truth of Christ and his Church. It is not applied to those who "do not know" this truth, the "invincibly ignorant" as they are called.[21] The term is offensive to some, but the semantic intention is clear. Hence, "no salvation outside the Church," while held as *de fide*, does not entail that all non-Catholics are damned. This leads us to the three qualifications that have been found in formal magisterial teaching since 1854.

The three qualifications are: (a) those Christian churches that are Trinitarian and carry out baptism are now included in the phrase "Church" in regard to salvation, not in regard to their equal ontological ecclesial status;[22] (b) those non-Christians who are in invincible ignorance cannot be said to be "lost" or "damned" by virtue of their explicit separation from Christ:[23] and (c) that if such non-Christians as in (b) are eventually saved, this salvation it is not given *de iure* through their religions.[24] *De iure* religion is willed by God and used by God in the objective history of salvation. In contrast, a *de facto* religion is used and permitted by God but not objectively willed by God.[25] This last teaching, (c), has arisen because since Vatican II some theologians have wrongly interpreted the Council as granting salvific legitimacy to the religions *per se*.[26] Admittedly, the key phrase *de iure* has not been used since. This teaching on the *de iure*/*de facto* distinction occurred while, at the same time admitting that grace, truth, and holiness can be found in the religious cultures of peoples, a teaching continuously emphasised by the magisterium since the Second Vatican Council.[27] This apparent tension is resolved because the

21 See Stephen Bullivant, "Sine Culpa. Vatican II and Inculpable Ignorance," *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), 70–86 for texts and discussion.

22 Herein lies the debate about the meaning of the crucial phrase in *Lumen* 8, 14 that the true Church of Christ "subsists in" the Catholic Church *(subsistit in Ecclesia catholica)* and that other Christian churches or ecclesial bodies share elements of that gift of subsistence.

23 *Lumen* 16: "Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own [*sine culpa ignorantes*] do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church . . . Nor does Divine Providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part [*qui sine culpa*], have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God. . . ." See also D'Costa, *Vatican II*, 62–80 for detailed discussion of this concept.

24 *Dominus Iesus*, 4 (and 8), introduces the distinction between *de iure* and *de facto* and this level of teaching is the weakest in terms of established magisterial authority. The fact that my use of it is central to the argument indicates the tentative nature of my argument.

25 Risto Jukko, *Trinity in Unity in Christian – Muslim Relations. The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 114, writing before *Dominus Iesus*, notes that the Vatican has not yet taken a stand on "whether different religions are to be considered *de iure*, entirely willed by God, or *de facto*, something only permitted by God."

26 Catherine Cornille, "Religious Pluralism and Christian Faith: A Case for Soteriological Agnosticism," *Actualidade Telogica* 40–41 (2012): 54.

27 *Redemptoris Missio*, 21–27, 28–29.

magisterial teachings still regard these cultures and religions as finally *praeparatio evangelica*, preparations for the fullness of the gospel. They are not, *per se*, as with the sacraments, the objectively divinely willed means of salvation.[28]

What, if anything, does no salvation outside the Church tell us about dual belonging? Possibly very little, but it does help orient us towards a solution. The "little" is because the claims generated from dual belonging to Hinduism cannot be judged *a priori* incompatible with the *de fide* teaching outlined previously. One must make a case-by-case judgement. This is an *a posteriori* matter. If there are no clear ontological, ethical, or ritual incompatibilities, then there may be a real possibility of dual belonging. It goes without saying that discerning such incompatibilities is a hugely complex task.

Part IV: the doctrinal teachings applied to Hindu-Catholic dual belonging

Some literature suggests Catholic dual belongers with Hinduism (and with Buddhism) often do end up denying this *de fide* teaching (or had already denied the teaching prior to their dual belonging).[29] This seems to be the case with the later works of Swami Abhishiktananda and Aloysius Pieris, Paul Knitter, Roger Corless, and others.[30] All eventually abandon this *de fide* teaching. All become, or already were, "pluralists" or what is technically termed "indifferentist" or "relativist" in magisterial statements.[31] Pluralists hold that different religions more or less, excepting obviously contestable candidates, are equally soteriological in their own right (what I have termed *de iure*).

Dual belonging does not require pluralism as a precondition to dual belonging. The principle I have been trying to establish is that a seminal *de fide* teaching, no salvation outside the Church, does allow the possibility of dual belonging. It allows, permits, and does not exclude such a possibility *a priori*. Geffré argues, "We are familiar enough with the official discourses proclaiming a plural identity simultaneously both fully Christian and wholly Indian, Chinese, or Japanese." In this sense, there is no *prima facie* incompatibility. But Geffré continues: "But what would the Indian identity consist of outside of Hinduism [or Islam or Jainism or Hinduism]? What would comprise the Chinese identity without the complex

28 See relevant magisterial texts in D'Costa*, Vatican II*, 99–107.

29 See Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian?* (London: Routledge, 2014).

30 See Santosh S. Cheruvally, *Jesus Christ. Question and Context of Abhishiktananda* (Henri Le Saux OSB) (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2011), who analyses Abhishiktananda's later works as being pluralist. See Raimon Panikkar, "Who is a Christian," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 121–45 for an alternative perspective.

31 Sarah Coakley, "Theology and Cultural Relativism – What is the Problem?" *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 21 (1979): 223–43 insightfully indicates the many types of relativism and in particular, forms such as epistemic relativism that do raise problems of antagonism, compared to many other forms which are spurious forms of relativism (what she calls soft relativism).

religious mixture of Taoism, Confucianism, and Hinduism? What is the Japanese identity apart from Zen Hinduism and the Shinto tradition?"[32]

Of course, if dual belonging to Hinduism required the denial of a *de fide* teaching, then belonging to the Catholic Church is compromised. If Manu (a theoretically constructed dual belonger) taught that "salvation" comes through Hinduism and this is understood *de iure*, as having nothing to do with Christ when such salvation happens in Hinduism, these beliefs clearly contravene what the magisterium teaches. Manu would fail to be a Catholic, which is purportedly what he wants to be. If Manu held this view he would be subscribing to "pluralism." The magisterium has repeatedly condemned "indifferentism" or "relativism": in effect, "pluralism." This is not to deny that there are different forms of "pluralism" or "relativism," but given what Manu holds, this would come under a form of relativism as defined by the magisterium.

Let me consider a slightly different scenario given Manu wants to be Catholic. Manu argues that Hinduism has been for him a means of salvation *de facto* and that Christ's grace, in his own experience, operates within Hinduism in this *de facto* salvific manner, but not in a *de iure* manner. Manu also argues that Hinduism has helped him become a better Catholic. Leave aside whether "salvific manner" in his first claim means justification or the preparation for justification, which are two distinct orders of grace. Manu clarifies: it means the latter. The former provides a route back to pluralism and Manu is avoiding this danger. If Manu made these claims while being a successful Hindu, which we are assuming, then he has achieved dual belonging. Manu is claiming that his own experience of Hinduism has led him to more deeply discover Christ's grace which has helped him become a better Catholic. Catholics should rejoice and learn. If Manu argued that Hindus could find the fullness of Christ's grace without Christ or the Church, or that becoming a better Catholic through Hinduism is a logically necessary prerequisite for all Catholics to attain salvation, then Manu would again be stepping over the line into pluralism. He would be holding to a *de iure* status for Hinduism in the first claim and the insufficiency of Christ's revelation for salvation in the second. The claim about being a better Catholic, as long as it does not question the sufficiency of Christ's revelation for salvation or have a logical necessity about it, seems utterly reasonable and plausible.

We now stumble upon an interesting paradox at this stage of the analysis, for that which Manu is claiming only holds, according to the magisterium, for those who do not know the truth of the Gospel through no fault of their own.[33] The *de facto* elements of Hinduism assisting Hindus towards salvation are conditional on invincible ignorance of the Catholic faith. Yet, Manu is a Hindu and regards Hinduism as existentially vital to his Catholic faith (not logically necessary, not

32 Claude Geffré, "Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 93–105, 96.

33 *Lumen*, 16 is framed entirely within this invincible ignorance clause. See my *Vatican II*, 62–80.

required by all Catholics, and not as an independent means to salvation – we shall take these for granted in all that follows). Under these conditions, following *Lumen Gentium* 16, Hinduism could only be viewed in this *de facto* manner for an invincibly ignorant Hindu. However, the invincibly ignorant clause only holds for those who are not Catholics through no fault of their own. Since this is not true of Manu, it is not a condition for his experiencing and arguing for the *de facto* salvific nature of his Hindu practices and beliefs. In fact, Manu helps the ecclesial community see the meaning of these distinctions between *de facto* and *de iure* even more clearly. He might write learned articles to help theologians on this point. The fact that he is not invincibly ignorant strengthens, rather than weakens, his claim that Hinduism has these remarkable truths, insights, and practices that help him become a better Catholic. It builds a bridge between Catholicism and Hinduism which is to be welcomed and to be further explored.

If this situation is credible, we appear to have full dual belonging in a subjective manner and possibly in an objective fashion. But some further questions arise before we can be sure about how to determine this question. Is Hinduism a genuine "other" religion in Manu's case or has it been so incorporated into Manu's Catholicism, such that it has become inculturated, received by him as part of the fullness of the Catholic faith? Is Manu's Hinduism any longer "Hinduism" as it is thought and practised by his Hindu community? Is Manu, by coming to this position, implicitly moving away from a belonging to Hinduism in one mode, towards a very different manner of belonging by making these claims? For the sake of argument, pretend that Manu's Hindu community and authority sources say: "Yes Manu, you are a Hindu as far as we are concerned, even if you now understand everything in terms of Christic causality." So, at one level, this may not be a problem. It is an issue for Manu's Hindu community to decide.

Manu's situation as a Catholic Hindu could be explored further by bringing out another magisterial teaching from the Catholic tradition to test the robustness of Catholicism in his dual belonging. This is the second key teaching. It regards the necessity of mission to all those who do not know Christ, stated clearly in *Lumen Gentium* 17, following on precisely from the key passages that have underlined the aforementioned discussion on no salvation outside the Church (*Lumen Gentium* 16–17). The teaching on mission is, I would argue, equivalent to a *de fide* teaching but has not been formally pronounced as such probably because it has never been disputed. The modern period is calling the universal necessity of mission into question and in recent magisterial statements the universal necessity of mission is constantly reiterated.[34] Vatican II held that all Trinitarian Christians are not to be "objects" of "mission," even if full communion with the See of Peter was still required for these churches or ecclesial communities to properly and fully *subsist* in Christ. *Lumen Gentium* 16–17 is clear that mission must be carried out to all those who do not know Christ, regardless of the impressive, good,

34 See the necessity of mission taught in Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975); John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990); and prior to that in *Lumen Gentium* 17; *Ad Gentes*, 3, 7.

and truthful religious (or non-religious) traditions they inhabit. I am obviously not denying the many evils and problems that have gone hand in hand with missionary work: the denigration of religious cultures; imperialism and arrogance; sociopolitical exploitation of those who are deemed as rejecting the gospel; and a failure to respect religious freedoms.[35] Nevertheless, while missionary theology has to work out strategies whereby these and other evils are avoided, it cannot give up on the central task: sharing Christ, the gospel, and the triune God in non-coercive ways.

We may now find that Manu is a missionary. He has discovered the true, good, and holy within Hinduism, and he embraces this and sees that it comes from and leads towards Christ. His practising within Hinduism represents both his discovery of its helpful benefits as well as his desire to share his journeying – with both Hindu and fellow Catholics. He truly wishes Hindus to come to Christ, seeing this as God's calling to all women and men. His form of mission is to be a witness to Christ amidst Hindus, but he is also genuinely a Hindu for the reasons given previously. Furthermore, Manu is also a missionary to Catholics regarding the many benefits he experiences, even if not the salvific necessity of Hinduism.

Both Jacques Dupuis and Peter Phan have noted that dual belonging is predicated upon the possibility of complementarity.[36] However, their versions of complementarity never seem to challenge the other religion or require mission, understood as a non-coercive conversionary invitation to ecclesial Christianity. It would "seem" that their form of complementarity has a telos towards pluralism: an ontologically enduring complementarity. Dupuis calls his position "inclusivist pluralism," as does Phan. I think their positions are in danger of sliding into pluralism. I have dealt with this elsewhere and will not repeat my arguments.[37]

Manu is beginning to look more like an inclusivist, not a pluralist. But he is not looking like a pluralist-inclusivist like Phan and Dupuis. However, Manu is responsive to an important critical point that Dupuis and Phan make against traditional forms of inclusivism and fulfilment: they operate in a unilateral direction. The "other" religion gains fulfilment in coming to Christianity. For Manu, there is an asymmetrical fulfilment: his Catholicism has become richer and deeper through his encounter with Hinduism (he has learnt meditation, ascetism, and has become more sensitive to the apophatic nature of God); his Hinduism has also reached fulfilment by being incorporated into his Catholicism. However, I use

35 One cannot minimise the destruction of cultures and practices carried out by missionaries, but a bigger picture is also helpful. See Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1990); Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

36 Jacques Dupuis, "Christianity and Religions. Complementarity and Convergence," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 61–75; Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 495–519.

37 See my *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

the term asymmetrical to indicate that there is an asymmetrical necessity: the Hindu necessarily requires Catholicism – as it provides the *de iure* means to salvation; the Catholic contingently requires Hinduism as Catholicism is the *de iure* means to salvation. This contingent need relates purely to salvation. It may well be Manu's discovery that without Advaita meditation and breathing exercises, without Sankara's soaring philosophy, and so on, his Catholicism is diminished. I am not questioning that.

This soteriological asymmetry clarifies why the term exclusivism rather than inclusivism best describes Manu's stance (which I share – in part, no doubt, as I've created him). Because of the problems in both these positions (in failing to adequately explain the mechanism and meaning of the necessity of Christ and his Church for salvation), I advanced what I called "open access exclusivism":[38] which holds to the necessity of Christ and the Church for salvation but allows for other religions to fulfil, challenge, and develop Christian thought and practice and allows that other religions have a *de facto* role in salvific history. This exclusivist position does not restrict salvation to visible Christians (some of whom may also be lost if they lack charity in their hearts). This open access exclusivism is based on the possibility of a final post-mortem judgement where Christ is explicitly known – and rejected or accepted.[39] Remember that Manu's view is that *de facto* salvation is operating as a grace that is a preparation for justification, not as justification itself, *de iure*.

Manu may see his witness as a proleptic sign of what Hindus should become so that their *de facto* practices can be transformed into a *de iure* religion: that is, by their becoming communicant Catholics. Manu's Hindu community may be persuaded by Manu, or think he is mad, or that he lacks integrity, or be entirely indifferent, or hopefully, be interested to discuss his thoughtful views. Whichever, let us imagine they still think Manu's views and practices are compatible with belonging to Hinduism. This then becomes a case of successful dual community belonging, not just an individual achieving this independently of the two communities (which is often the case with westerners who are dual belongers in an Asian tradition).

Additional reasons to think this scenario meets the highest conditions of belonging is because Manu would also be embracing a third key teaching: the importance of inculturation for the full Catholicity of the Church.[40] Inculturation has no important doctrinal status as such, which does not imply its overall lack of importance. It has slightly taken a back seat since the Council, partly because the inculturation of secularism and other religions was increasingly seen to lead to relativism.[41] For my purpose here, inculturation involves

38 See Ibid., 19–25.

39 See Ibid., 159–211.

40 On mission, see my *Vatican II*, 81–89 and the bibliography provided there.

41 See Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London: Routledge, 2003) for an excellent analysis of this crisis.

two key elements: the recognition that (a) there is truth, goodness, and holiness outside the Church within non-Christian cultures and (b) these elements are ennobled, healed, and purified through their baptism and regeneration in Christ.[42] Dan Strange's notion of "subversive fulfilment" is helpful in bringing out the force of the change and transformation of truth, goodness, and holiness outside the Church when it meets with regeneration in Christ.[43] Too often, the transition is understood as "grace perfecting nature" as if there were no change to the elements of "nature." Recalling Manu, one might see that his appropriation of Hinduism may not bear much resemblance to what his Hindu community hold. That they live with this dissonance and allow Manu belonging status is being assumed. But the correlative of Manu's missionary zeal is also his zeal for a fuller "inculturation" of Hinduism into Catholicism to develop the universality of Catholic reality. This deep inculturation has only really been through "Western" forms for the church that makes up the Latin West, but it is the same church that is now established in non-Western cultures and seeks to become organic within those cultures while being true to the traditions that have made it Christian.

Manu may genuinely help his fellow Catholics through teaching them silent breathing meditation. Does this practice entail the slow absorption and eventual acceptance of a Hindu cosmology underlying the techniques of meditation?[44] For the sake of argument, let us assume it is incompatible with Catholicism. Then the question is: can the practice of this mediation be detached from such a cosmology and utilised in a Christoform manner (whatever that might be)? There is another question: Is the incompatibility something that rightly challenges the Catholic calls into question what they hold to be true? But, for the moment, let us leave that aside. I am also presuming that this rigorous self-questioning would be pursued, but on *de fide* matters, the benefit of the doubt must be given to the *de fide* doctrines.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith's, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of Christian Meditation* (1989) was nuanced about this very issue. It shows that there can be very positive forms of integration and learning from "eastern methods of meditation" and of the three

42 I use the terms of *Lumen Gentium*, 16–17; *Ad Gentes,* 3, 8, 9; *Nostra Aetate,* 2.

43 See Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Leicester: Apollos, 2014) for his elaboration of this idea; and Daniel Strange, "There Can Only Be One: The Impossibility and Idolatry of Dual Belonging," in *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging. Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*, ed. Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson (Ashgate: Farnham, Surrey, 2016), 71–88.

44 This was arguably the issue for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's *Notification* (1998) concerning the later writings of Fr Anthony De Mello. Again, note the assumed legitimacy of De Mello's spiritual learning from these traditions in the affirmation of his earlier works drawing on Hinduism and Taoism. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19980624_demello_en.html.

methods listed, only the third is subject to serious questioning. The first two are positively viewed:

> 12. With the present diffusion of eastern methods of meditation in the Christian world and in ecclesial communities, we find ourselves faced with a pointed renewal of an attempt, which is not free from dangers and errors, *to fuse Christian meditation with that which is non-Christian*. Proposals in this direction are numerous and radical to a greater or lesser extent. Some use eastern methods solely as a psycho-physical preparation for a truly Christian contemplation; others go further and, using different techniques, try to generate spiritual experiences similar to those described in the writings of certain Catholic mystics. [Note: See, for example, "The Cloud of Unknowing," a spiritual work by an anonymous English writer of the fourteenth century.] Still others do not hesitate to place that absolute without image or concepts, which is proper to Buddhist theory, [note: In Buddhist religious texts, the concept of "Nirvana" is understood as a state of quiet consisting in the extinction of every tangible reality insofar as it is transient, and as such delusive and sorrowful] on the same level as the majesty of God revealed in Christ, which towers above finite reality. To this end, they make use of a "negative theology," which transcends every affirmation seeking to express what God is and denies that the things of this world can offer traces of the infinity of God. Thus, they propose abandoning not only meditation on the salvific works accomplished in history by the God of the Old and New Covenant, but also the very idea of the One and Triune God, who is Love, in favour of an immersion "in the indeterminate abyss of the divinity." [Note: Meister Eckhart speaks of an immersion "in the indeterminate abyss of the divinity" which is a "darkness in which the light of the Trinity never shines." Cf. Sermo "Ave Gratia Plena" in fine (J. Quint, Deutsche Predigten und Traktate, Hanser 1955, 261).] These and similar proposals to harmonize Christian meditation with eastern techniques need to have their contents and methods ever subjected to a thorough-going examination so as to avoid the danger of falling into syncretism.[45]

What is interesting in this document is the utter openness to the new, to different cultures and their treasures, along with a prudent sense of problems that might arise. Experienced practitioners and scholars need to cooperate together to conduct a "through-going examination" of the issues so that there can be wider sharing of the good fruits of such engagement. Historically, there are many instances of Catholics employing local pre-Christian religious rites in shaping their Catholic culture. This is true of Christianity in India which has a long prehistory and

45 www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19891015_meditazione-cristiana_en.html.

took many shapes and forms well before the incursion of the Latin Western forms in the sixteenth century.[46]

Part V: is there anything distinctive within Hinduism that determines it as a *sui generis* case of dual belonging?

Before concluding, one interesting question is raised. Is there anything distinctive about Hinduism (doctrinally, theologically, and practically), which would affect the Roman Catholic perspective on the possibilities of dual belonging? The answer, I suspect, is both yes and no. Yes, in so much as Hinduism presents a cosmology, metaphysics, ethics, and a set of practices that are unique and thus will deeply and healthily destabilise the Catholic outlook. Hence, the very framing of this question has been limited by the Latin Western tradition of Roman Catholicism. Were there to arise a long tradition of Hindu-Catholics, that Latin tradition would sit alongside one that was informed by a new tradition. Just as Aristotle informed Aquinas, so Śaṁkara or Rāmānuja would inform an emergent Hindu Catholicism. It is difficult to predict the shape of these emergent traditions other than having glimpses of them in remarkable pioneers like Abhishiktananda and Bede Griffiths and Raimundo Panikkar. Interestingly, non-European Indians have tended to interact more with liberationist movements and thus liberation theology (and thus Marxism) or "tribal" forms of Indian religious culture rather than the caste-structured orthodoxy that were the "Hindu" dialogue partners of the early European pioneers. Hence, the "yes" would consist of a "watch this space" as Indian Catholicism develops. Indian Catholicism will make false and unhelpful roads as well as flourishing and generative roads and those decisions about the turns in the roads are often more fruitfully made retrospectively than prospectively.

The "no" in the answer consists in the special role of the Latin Western tradition which is part of the providential steps of God's word to his people. I do not mean that the Latin Western tradition does not contain errors and myopia. One such example is its treatment of the Jewish people, and it was precisely within that Latin Western tradition, in the shape of the Second Vatican Council, that those errors and myopia began to be corrected. Within "traditions" (plural would be wisest as Yves Congar reminds us),[47] that which cannot be jettisoned are the authoritative doctrinal teachings delivered by the formal magisterium that have been transmitted as a response to revelation and an unfolding of that revelation. Determining what belongs to this authentic core and what does not is a demanding and complex question. For now, let me cite Pope John Paul II who attended

46 See, for example, Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and *A History of Christianity in India: 1707–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

47 See Yves Congar, *Tradition and Traditions. An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1967).

to this "no" in a deeply positive manner. In *Faith and Reason* (1998), he writes of the great Eastern traditions, clearly showing the dynamics of the yes and no I am trying to describe:

> My thoughts turn immediately to the lands of the East, so rich in religious and philosophical traditions of great antiquity. Among these lands, India has a special place. A great spiritual impulse leads Indian thought to seek an experience which would liberate the spirit from the shackles of time and space and would therefore acquire absolute value. The dynamic of this quest for liberation provides the context for great metaphysical systems.
>
> In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. In this work of discernment, which finds its inspiration in the Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate*, certain criteria will have to be kept in mind. The first of these is the universality of the human spirit, whose basic needs are the same in the most disparate cultures. The second, which derives from the first, is this: in engaging great cultures for the first time, the Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. To reject this heritage would be to deny the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history. This criterion is valid for the Church in every age, even for the Church of the future, who will judge herself enriched by all that comes from today's engagement with Eastern cultures and will find in this inheritance fresh cues for fruitful dialogue with the cultures which will emerge as humanity moves into the future. Thirdly, care will need to be taken lest, contrary to the very nature of the human spirit, the legitimate defence of the uniqueness and originality of Indian thought be confused with the idea that a particular cultural tradition should remain closed in its difference and affirm itself by opposing other traditions.[48]

Conclusions

In depicting Manu, I have tried to show his commitment to these magisterial teachings as well as his courageous and pioneering Catholic-Hindu dual belonging. I have also suggested that he is best labelled a soteriological exclusivist dual belonger, given his adherence to the magisterium of the Catholic Church. I have also suggested that this theoretical case, while not part of the consideration of the magisterium, has an analogical basis in the acceptance of Hebrew Catholics within the Catholic Church. This is a bare-bones conceptual exercise. One would

48 John Pope Paul II, *Faith and Reason: Encyclical Letter of the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Relationship between Faith and Reason* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1998), para. 72.

have to relate these findings to various cases of Catholic-Hindu dual belonging to see the problems with this model as well as with the reality in the field – and whether such a neat model is even helpful in dealing with the complex and messy reality.

References

Bullivant, Stephen. "Sine Culpa. Vatican II and Inculpable Ignorance." *Theological Studies* 72 (2011): 70–86.

Cheruvally, Santosh S. *Jesus Christ. Question and Context of Abhishiktananda* (Henri Le Saux OSB). New Delhi: ISPCK, 2011.

Coakley, Sarah. "Theology and Cultural Relativism – What Is the Problem?" *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 21 (1979): 223–43.

Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews. *"The Gifts and the Calling of God Are Irrevocable" (Rom 11:29) – A Reflection on Theological Questions Pertaining to Catholic-Jewish Relations* (December 10, 2015). www.christianunity.va.

Congar, Yves. *Tradition and Traditions. An Historical and a Theological Essay*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1967.

Cornille, Catherine. *The Guru in Indian Catholicism. Ambiguity or Opportunity of Inculturation*. Leuven: Peeters Press and Eerdmans, 1991.

———, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.

D'Costa, Gavin. "Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christian: A Reappraisal." *Modern Theology* 1, no. 2 (1985): 131–48.

———. "Inculturation: India and Other Religions." *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 121–48.

———. *Sexing the Trinity: Gender, Culture and the Divine*. London: SCM Press, 2000.

———. *Christianity and World Religions: Disputed Questions in the Theology of Religions*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

———. *Vatican II: Catholic Doctrines on Jews and Muslims*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

———. "Assessing Catholic-Buddhist Dual Belonging in the Light of the Catholic Magisterium." In *Philosophical and Theological Responses to Syncretism*, edited by Mika Vähäkangas and Patrik Fridlund, 104–62. Leiden and Boston: BRILL, 2017.

Drew, Rose. *Buddhist and Christian?* London: Routledge, 2014.

Dupuis, Jacques. "Christianity and Religions. Complementarity and Convergence." In *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, edited by Catherine Cornille, 61–75. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Finisterhölzl, Johann. "Theological Notes." In *Encyclopaedia of Theology. The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, edited by Karl Rahner, 1678–85. London: Burns & Oates, 1981, 1975.

Friedman, Elias. *Jewish Identity*. New York: Miriam Press, 1987.

Geffré, Claude. "Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion." In *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, edited by Catherine Cornille, 93–105. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.

Grillmeier, Aloys. "Commentary on the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church." In *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, edited by Herbert Vorgrimler, 153–85, vol. 1. London: Burns & Oates, 1967.

Henn, Alexander. "Religious Pluralism and Christian Faith: A Case for Soteriological Agnosticism." *Actualidade Telogica* (2012): 40–41.

———. *Hindu-Catholic Encounters in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014.

Jukko, Risto. *Trinity in Unity in Christian – Muslim Relations. The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

Neill, Stephen. *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

———. *A History of Christianity in India: 1707–1858*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Panikkar, Raimon. "Who Is a Christian." In *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, edited by Catherine Cornille, 121–45. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.

Phan, Peter C. "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church." *Theological Studies* 64 (2003): 495–519.

Rowland, Tracey. *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II*. London: Routledge, 2003.

Sanneh, Lamin. *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989.

Sarma, Deepak. "Madhva, Dialogue and Discernment." In *Criteria of Discernment in Interreligious Dialogue*, edited by Catherine Cornille. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009.

Stanley, Brian. *The Bible and the Flag*. Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1990.

Strange, Daniel. *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions*. Leicester: Apollos, 2014.

———. "There Can Only Be One: The Impossibility and Idolatry of 'Dual Belonging'." In *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging. Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*, edited by Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson, 71–88. Ashgate: Farnham, Surrey, 2016.

Sullivan, Francis. *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992.

6 Where we start, who we are, and what we seek

The born versus the convert "dual belonger"[1]

Rachel Fell McDermott

Conversations[1] about "dual belonging" usually involve three main questions or subject areas: who can claim to have achieved it, how is it realised and instantiated, and what do the term and experience mean? A survey of the scholarly work on the subject indicates a more or less common consensus about each of these topical areas – what one might call the who, how, and what of "dual belonging": first, those who are particularly drawn to attempt such belonging do so as adults, often after a "conversion" experience of sorts, when a second religious tradition comes into their orbit of personal identity formation; second, theological ideas are typically the point of entry, or at the very least a necessary aspect of the forged outcome, with ritual or institutional ties being later frontiers of exploration; and third, "true" dual belonging, in the sense of full ritual, theological, and institutional engagement in two religious traditions simultaneously, is nearly impossible to achieve, although certain individuals appear to veer very close to such belonging at certain points in their lives. As such, perhaps the term "dual belonging" needs revision.

In this essay, I address all three of these issues, but from a particular vantage point. Here, I am interested less in those who choose their belonging, whether singular, dual, or multiple, than in those who have it thrust upon them by birth or context. Who we are and where we start may determine how we seek and what we find. As such, this essay complements that in this volume by Ankur Barua, who also begins his account with the influence on individuals of familial or societal context. I use the term "dual belonging" throughout; only in my conclusion do I consider its utility.

Why do we always seem to start with Christians?

But first, a note about us, we who write about dual belonging and, in terms of this volume, Hindu-Christian dual belonging. The scholarly, biographical, and autobiographical literature on dual belongers is almost entirely devoted to

1 I use diacritics for the following types of words: deities' names with the exception of Krishna (unless I am quoting a translation by someone else where diacritics are not included); Sanskrit terms; the spelling of first lines of poems or of Bengali book titles. I do not give diacritics to proper names of people or names of temples or places.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-6

converts – that is, people who start life in one tradition, become fascinated by and eventually drawn into another tradition without repudiating their birth tradition, and then expend considerable energy in trying to reconcile, or live with, perhaps live in, both at once. Within the specific field of Hindu-Christian Studies, such converts tend to start as Christians.[2] Reasons for this are not hard to divine, and here, I present five.

First, for the initial nearly one thousand years of its presence in the subcontinent, Christianity evoked almost no reaction among Indians – Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, or Muslim.[3] The earliest Christians settled in South India, in Kerala and Tamil Nadu, and claim to derive from the time of St. Thomas in the first century, something that the chapter by Renish Geevarghese Abraham in this volume explores in more detail. But one looks in vain in Indian literature of the time for any reaction, interest, even notice, of Christians. Of course, in the early centuries of our Common Era, there was very little sense of a "Hindu" identity, certainly not as we would understand it today, and since the early Christian converts were principally, as far as we can understand, of high caste, they would not have represented any social challenge to the normal fabric of South Indian society. From the early seventh century until the coming of the Portuguese in 1498, the only evidence we have of Indian Christian communities comes from the travellers' accounts of four men, the most famous of whom was the adventurer Marco Polo.[4]

Second, the very conception of "dual belonging" depends on an assumption that the two religious traditions in question are not already unified in some way, that they are distinct and separable wholes that must somehow be made compatible with each other in the adherent. In India, there are, of course, a number of famous Hindu intellectuals who did convert to Christianity, such as Krishna Mohan Banerjee (1813–1885), Michael Madhusudan Dutt (1824–1873), Pandita Ramabai (1858–1922), Brahmobandhab Upadhyay (1861–1907), and Sadhu

2 The same is true of scholars exploring Buddhist-Christian dual belonging. See, for example, Rose Drew, *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging* (New York: Routledge, 2011), who bases her book on interviews with six individuals who have publicly identified themselves with both traditions; all of them were raised in a Christian tradition and came to Buddhism later. Also, consult Paul Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be Christian* (New York: Oneworld, 2009); Ross Thompson, *Buddhist Christianity: A Passionate Openness* (Winchester: John Hunt Publishing, 2010); Jonathan A. Seitz, "Religious Dualism and the Problem of Dual Religious Identity," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 35 (2015): 49–55; and *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*, ed. Gavin D'Costa and Ross Thompson (London: Routledge, 2016).

3 Christians claim their presence in India since the time of St. Thomas, in the first century; scholars cannot definitively corroborate this until the third or fourth century CE. See Robert Eric Frykenberg, "Thomas Christians and the Thomas Tradition," in *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 90–115. One searches almost in vain to find any Hindu reference to Christians, let alone the nuances of their theology or rituals.

4 Robert Eric Frykenberg, "*Pfarangi* Catholic Christians and *Padroado* Christendom," in *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 117–18.

Sundar Singh (1889–1929).[5] But, as was discovered to their dismay by the early Protestant and Catholic missionaries in India, from the time of the Catholic Orders under the Portuguese to the Anglicans, Baptists, and Presbyterians under the British, Hindus found it exceptionally easy to fold Christian ideas into their own Hindu worldviews. Jesus, for an example, could be understood as an incarnation (*avatāra*) of God and revered, even worshipped, without the necessity of leaving the Hindu tradition. Renowned nineteenth-century Hindus, such as Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884), Ramakrishna (1836–1886), and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), were all attracted for various reasons to the figure of Jesus but not interested in conversion to Christianity. One might say in general that Hindus have less far to traverse theologically than Christians, there already being a capacious category of incarnation in the Hindu tradition; devout Hindus can encompass Jesus in Hindu terms rather than needing to convert and then struggling with dual belonging. This is one aspect of the phenomenon of Hindu-Christian dual belonging that is unique to this particular coupling of traditions: the Hindu concept of *avatāra* provides a bridge to the Christian idea of incarnation. Such a bridge enables crossing not only from one side to another but also of course a return to one's own side.

Third, those Hindus who did convert to Christianity – and their number amounts to at least 2.3% of India today – were and mainly continue to be discouraged from entertaining anything even slightly resembling "dual belonging"; although some missions, particularly the Catholic, spent decades arguing over whether caste was integral to the Hindu tradition or was a social custom – if the latter, it could be tolerated by new Christian converts – most Protestant missionaries, at least from approximately 1540 onwards, tried strenuously to strip from the new converts any ritual or belief from their former lives, the mixing or retaining of Hindu religiosity being considered anathema. Some Hindus returned this compliment; consider the Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayananda Sarasvati in 1875, which created a ritual of conversion to the Hindu tradition that was meant to cleanse its initiates from any prior (often Christian) impurity. At the popular level, both Catholic and Protestant, one can identify many hybrid customs, such as the Virgin being revered in a manner parallel to that of a Hindu goddess, or ordination ceremonies including tribal rites of initiation, but such "riting between the lines"

5 Among these, Brahmobandhab comes closest to a dual belonger; in fact, after his conversion to Catholicism in 1891, he called himself a "Hindu-Catholic," believing that his physical and mental side was Hindu, while his soul was Catholic. Before his death in 1907, however, he repudiated his Christianity and returned, after a ceremony of "cleansing," to his Hindu tradition. Amy Yu Fu calls him a "paradoxical" figure "stuck in two traditions, belonging neither here nor there" (74). See Amy Yu Fu, "Rethinking 'Dual Belonging' and a Confucian Christian's Struggle in Late Ming China," *Journal of Ecumencial Studies* 53, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 70–93. The best study of Brahmobandhab remains that by Julius J. Lipner, *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary* (New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

has occurred with church leaders averting their eyes or tolerating such admixtures in an uneasy balance.[6]

Fourth, the phenomenon of "turning East" that occurred in the West from the time of the Unitarians, the Theosophists, the Beats, and the New Age, had little analogue in India among Hindus. This was in large part due to the colonial situation on the ground in India, where after a brief period of openness to Hindu thought in the early nineteenth century (what David Kopf termed the "Orientalist" period before the turn in the 1830s to a more "Anglicist" policy),[7] Indians had the "West" forced upon them in terms of industry, education, law, and government. After the Rebellion of 1857 and until Independence in 1947, it would become more and more politically unsavoury, even difficult, for an Indian to espouse an interest in Christianity without it seeming to be tied to a support for British rule. Becoming attracted to the religious faith tradition of an "other" can happen best from a position of perceived freedom. In addition, from the time of Swami Vivekananda, it became commonplace to think that what the East had to offer the world was spirituality; what the West gave was material progress. Christian spirituality was not what the West offered.

Finally, the sorts of enclaves or Christian ashramas in India where Hindus might encounter Christians who would be considered holy by Hindu standards are extremely controversial today. Suspected of being wilfully established to trap Hindus into converting to Christianity, such ashramas are denounced by right-wing Hindus. The possibility of finding a comfortable environment for Hindus to think about dual belonging in India is therefore often constricted by political currents.[8] If one considers that Hindus often combine participation in temple ritual with the guidance of some sort of lineage or personal guru, the fact that Christian priests or pastors rarely present themselves as such is another hindrance to the establishment of a context in which Christianity is attractive as a faith tradition for deep engagement.

These five historical reasons help us to see why the quest for dual belonging tends to start with mature Christians reaching out to the Hindu tradition with zeal and ardour and not the other way around.

Already living in the dual

If, as I have argued previously, those who think about Hindu-Christian dual belonging are mainly Christians who arrive at the topic because of an attraction

6 See the essays in Selva J. Raj and Corrine G. Dempsey, eds., *Popular Christianity in India: Riting between the Lines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

7 David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

8 See Sita Ram Goel, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* (New Delhi: The Voice of India, 1988) and *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters, AD 304 to 1996* (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1996); also, Arun Shourie, *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994) and *Harvesting Our Souls: Missionaries, Their Design, Their Claims* (New Delhi: ASA Publications, 2000).

to Hinduism experienced as an adult, what can we say about their "conversion"? With the exception of the (unrepresentative and small-scale) ceremonies created by the Arya Samaj, the Hindu tradition has no formal mechanism for conversion; one is either born a Hindu or one is not. The scant attention given to matters of belief in the definition of a Hindu is shown by the refusal of some of India's most conservative Hindu temples to open their doors to anyone not born of Hindu parents; the famed Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha, is closed even to the Hari Krishna members of ISKCON, who, like all other foreigners, must look into the courtyard of the temple from the "foreigner's perch," a ladder overlooking the wall. Even Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India in 1966–1977 and 1980–1984, was not allowed into that temple because she had married a Parsi. Clearly, personal piety and faith make no difference in such contexts. Hence, when I state that most dual belongers are "converts," I am not speaking of a formal ritual of conversion to Hinduism but about the process of being moved by new ideas, customs, people, and types of spirituality, such that one wants to explore them further and take them on board, so to speak, as an integral part of one's own self-identification. As the authors of a number of essays and books on dual belonging argue, dual belonging is primarily something rational and intellectual; the challenge is the reconciliation of seemingly irreconcilable truth claims – a polydoxy?[9] – within the singular person of the believer.

Another way to approach dual belonging is through the experience of born dual belongers, often children whose parents come from different faith traditions. The important point here is that dual belonging is not a personal choice but a circumstance elected for one by one's parents. HinJews, Om-Shalomers, or JuBus are names given to the children of Jewish and Hindu, or Jewish and Buddhist, parents; as far as I know, there are no neologisms like Hinstians or ChristHinds for the parallel phenomenon under study in this volume. Nevertheless, the blended family experience will be similar, with the potential for a mixing of institutional affiliations, beliefs, and ritual actions.

My own impression is that because the mixing in many ways seems so natural and innate, born dual belongers do not feel the need quite as strongly as "convert" dual belongers to introspect, engage in comparison of theological minutiae, or choose a position. Theological flip-flopping feels easier. Or, if at one point in their lives doctrinal judgement seems necessary, they do not close off the roads not taken but live with the fact that many roads exist, even with potential cognitive dissonance or internal unresolved tension. In many ways, this corresponds to what Catherine Cornille calls a "personal synthesis."[10] Moreover, born dual belongers do

9 See Catherine Keller and Laurel Schneider, eds., *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011); Catherine Keller, "Theology's Multitude: Polydoxy Reviewed and Renewed," *Modern Theology* 30, no. 3 (July 2014): 127–39. See also Kang-San Tan, "Dual Belonging: A Missiological Critique and Appreciation from an Asian Evangelical Perspective," *Mission Studies* 27, no. 1 (2010): 24–38.

10 Catherine Cornille, "Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity – 2012," Santa Clara Lectures 1, p. 18, https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/sc_lectures/1.

not have to be exhorted or decide to participate in rituals of both traditions,[11] for the participation is already there, a given. In other words, the "convert" dual belonger self-consciously embraces a conundrum, whereas the born dual belonger inherits it.

A second type of born dual belonger is the person whose community is surrounded by people from another tradition or traditions. Again, to quote Catherine Cornille: "In the wider history of religion, multiple religious belonging may have been the rule rather than the exception, at least on a popular level."[12] I think in this regard of Richard Eaton, who in his award-winning book, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*[13] argues that there are three stages in conversion to a new religious tradition. First, the new tradition enters a region and is accommodated in people's religious universe, as an add-on. Then parallels and links are made between the old and the new, still without the necessity for choosing or prioritising. Finally, often as a result of preachers from the outside fired with zeal for doctrinal and ritual "purity," locals feel the necessity for displacing the old with the new, cutting out or denying earlier elements.[14] Bengal, in fact, until the lead-up to Partition in the 1920s through 1940s, was an excellent example of this type of "composite" culture, where Hindu and Muslim ideas, deities, and customs were tolerated alongside one another – although inter-dining and intermarrying were never common.

In what follows, I would like to explore both types of born dual belonger: first, someone for whom it is cultural ambiance, rather than parental influence, that offers the opportunity for a wider sense of belonging; and second, the child nurtured in a home with double religious affiliations. Both examples offer some lessons for thinking about dual belonging.

The mixed life of Kazi Nazrul Islam

There are probably many examples in India of born dual belongers, but the one I know best and who, to my mind, presents an extraordinary opportunity for examination of the phenomenon is a Bengali Muslim. Even though the "dual"ness encompasses Islam and Hinduism, not Christianity and Hinduism, his life story is worth considering.

Nazrul was born in 1899 to a Muslim family in British India, in what was then a united province of Bengal (encompassing both the modern state of West

11 Rose Drew refers to Aloysius Pieris's advice that Christians and Buddhists should participate in each other's religious observances; this participation then is a willed undertaking. See Drew, *Buddhist and Christian?* (4). See also the chapter of Nadya Pohran, in this volume, for discussions of ritual and community acceptance.

12 Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 1.

13 Richard Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993).

14 For Bengal, the classic description of such a process is Rafiuddin Ahmed's, *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity* (New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Bengal in India and the country of Bangladesh). His family was very poor, and he never finished high school, leaving before his final exams to enlist in the British army in World War I, where he was stationed in Karachi. When the war was over, he returned to India, to Calcutta, where he joined a group of like-minded literary men in producing a newspaper and in writing revolutionary, anti-British poetry. Some of his most famous poems derive from this period, and many of them are totally unlike anything anyone had written in Bengal before, not only in rhythm and style, but also in his explosive, emotive language – often incorporating imagery and heroes from both Hindu and Muslim traditions. In his most famous poem, "*Bidrohī*," "The Rebel," from 1921, he compares the dread energy of the political rebel to Śiva, Durgā, Kālī, and a host of other Hindu mythological and religious figures, in addition to Genghis Khan and a series of Muslim heroes. In "*Kṛṣāner Gān*," "The Song of the Peasant," from 1926, he likens the innocence of the exploited agricultural labourers to figures from the Hindu epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and to actors in the Muslim narrative about the martyrdom of Hussain at Karbala:

> We are the true children of the soil,
> green as the young grass,
> Rama, the enemy of Ravana, is lying hidden in
> our beauty,
> And Sita is none other than the harvest we reap
> at the point of our plough.
> Yet today Ravana is robbing us of Sita,
> the paddy of our fields.
> Comrade, we are martyrs sacrificing our lives.
> In the Mecca of our fields,
> The harvest reaped of our blood
> Is being robbed by Satan.
> Where can we go, Comrade?
> Fire awaits us at home
> And a raging storm outside.
> Today the gang of Yazid has surrounded us
> Killing us mercilessly.[15]

In 1926, at the height of Hindu-Muslim tensions in Bengal, fearing that communal mistrust would undermine any chance for a united front against the British, Nazrul wrote "*Kāṇḍārī Huśiyār*!", or "Helmsman, Beware!" Here the helmsman, or the captain, is ferrying across the turbulent political ocean of Bengal a boatload of ordinary Bengalis. He speaks to the captain, telling him not to differentiate

15 Translated by Kabir Chowdhury, *The Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English Translation*, ed. Mohammad Nurul Huda (Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1997), 334.

between the religious orientations of the passengers: all should be brought to safety.

> You must lead them to victory
> O Captain, my Captain.
> The helpless nation is going under water.
> It does not know how to swim.
> I shall watch tonight
> Your determination, grim yet bright,
> to free the country from slavery.
> "Are they Hindus or Muslims?"
> Who asks this question, I say.
> Tell him, my Captain,
> The children of the motherland are drowning today.[16]

How do we account for the specifically "mixed" literary phenomenon that is Nazrul? We know, from a letter he wrote to a schoolteacher named Ibrahim Khan in 1927,[17] that he considered literature the only way to eliminate distrust between Hindus and Muslims; in fact, he purposely introduced Hindu and Muslim imagery in his revolutionary poems in order to knock down barriers and to raise up a common sensibility.

> Bengali literature is the literature of both Hindus and Muslims. If Muslims see the names of Hindu gods and goddesses in it they will get angry, just as Hindus contract their eyebrows if they see everyday Muslim words in their literature. I am a complete believer in the mixing of Hindu and Muslim. That is why, in order to strike blows at these customs, I use Muslim words as well as the names of Hindu gods and goddesses. Because of this, the beauty of my poetry has certainly been hurt. But I have done it, aware of the consequences.[18]

Here, then, the dualness of his language is not a theological conviction or a personal exploration but a sociopolitical tool.

It is abundantly clear that Nazrul cared about all of Bengal – in particular, the oppressed, whether women, outcastes, coolies, farm labourers, Muslims, or those ground down by poverty. But perhaps, he paid most attention to the uplifting of Muslim youth. Indeed, not all of Nazrul's poems and songs utilise interwoven Hindu and Muslim imagery. He wrote many, many poems and songs that

16 Ibid., 351–52.

17 See the Bhadra 1334 (1927) number of "*Naoroj*" ("New Day"), where a letter to Nazrul Islam by principal Ibrahim Khan was published; the reply was published in the Paus number 1334 of "*Saogāt*." See *Najrul-Racanābalī*, 20 vols. (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2009), 9: 183.

18 Ibid., 189.

are devoted entirely to love, others that are entirely on Hindu religious themes, and still others that are focused on Islamic heroes, events, and hopes. In several famous poems, he idolises Kemal Pasha, the architect of modern Turkey; writes of his devotion to the Prophet, his teachings, and the holy days of the religious calendar; and signals his pride in the social achievements of true Islam.

Especially in Bangladesh today, Nazrul is lauded as "the pioneer of Muslim regeneration in Bengal," and there is no dearth of evidence for this claim. What Nazrul loved and took from Islam was the humanism and freedom at its core. His introduction of the Persian *ghazal* form into the Bengali language in 1926; his innovation, from 1932, of composing and recording Islamic devotional songs in Bengali (their popularity, given that Bengali Muslims had been strongly averse to devotional music, was astonishing); his personal support for Bengali Muslim student and youth movements; and his call for Muslims to awaken to political consciousness – all these bespeak his care of and identification with the Muslim community.

But there is another Nazrul, one who – to our postcolonial world of national and religious boundaries – seems quite surprising. After a first, near-marriage to a young Muslim girl, he fell in love with a Hindu girl, Asalata (or Pramila) Sengupta, in 1923. No one from the entire Sengupta family supported the wedding except for Pramila's widowed mother, Giribala, who took Nazrul and Pramila to Calcutta and quietly got them married. Nazrul did not want Pramila to convert, so Giribala arranged that they could be married in the way that the Mughals wed Rajput women, considering their wives "People of the Book."[19]

This marriage generated a negative reaction among Hindu and Muslim communities, although neither Nazrul nor his wife involved themselves in a religious community or ritual life at all. They gave their sons double-barrelled names, like Krishna Muhammad (b./d. 1923), Arindam Khaled (1926–1930), Kazi Sabyasachi (1929–1979), and Kazi Aniruddha (1930–1974), and their home was open to friends of all backgrounds and persuasions – Nazrul's hospitality was legendary, even when he was in a state of absolute penury. Giribala Devi, who lived with them during most of their married life, performed Lakṣmī Pūjā every Thursday in their home, and Nazrul inaugurated several Durgā Pūjā celebrations over the course of his life. When Pramila was dying in June 1962, after having been paralysed from the waist down for 23 years, their son Kazi Sabyasachi asked a Muslim friend of his father how he should conduct her funeral rites. Even though Pramila had always worn the signs of a married Hindu woman, no one had ever seen her observe any religious rites.[20] The friend assured Sabyasachi that he could cremate his mother according to Hindu custom, if he wanted, since she had never

19 Sujātā Sengupta, *Kāzī Nazrul Islām o Āmār Māmābāḍī* (Hāorāh: Sahajpaṭh, 2012), 73. Here "People of the Book" refers to Jews and Christians, whom the Prophet designated as protected and from whose communities he permitted Muslims to take wives. Nazrul renamed his wife Pramila, after the wife of Ravana's son Indrajit, from the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* story.

20 Ibid., 116.

converted. But apparently her dying wish was that she be buried, not cremated, so that she could lie in the grave next to Nazrul, when his time came.[21] Nazrul and Pramila, it seemed, lived between, not immersed personally in, two religious traditions.

Nazrul's catholic attitude was not a passive acceptance; he seems to have been able to move effortlessly and with enthusiasm between cultural-linguistic-religious worlds. He knew enough about Hindu mythology and belief – perhaps gained from his youthful involvement in a travelling extemporaneous poetry group – to compose music and songs for plays and films on Hindu figures and themes. In a series of three letters in August and September 1938, written to Baradacaran Majumdar, his Śākta Tantric guru, when his wife had first been attacked by paralysis, he addresses him in Hindu reverential terms as "Śrī Śrī Caraṇārabindeṣu," "At Your Lotus-feet," calls him the embodiment of Lord Śiva, begs for his *darśan*, and thanks him for his care of him in life after life.[22] Indeed, although it is possible that Nazrul's songs to Kālī, written in the 1930s, were a mere dabbling in a literary genre and had no personal meaning for the poet, I think it likely that this outpouring of devotion to the Goddess was genuine. When no medicine seemed to help Pramila, Nazrul went on a pilgrimage to nearby Śiva and Kālī temples at Tarakeshvar, Dakshineshvar, and Syambazar. Lest one become convinced, however, that Nazrul had become a goddess-worshipper only, it should be remembered that his Krishna-centric and Islamic songs also derive from this same, introspective and agonised period in his life.

In spite of the seeming ease with which Nazrul moved, emotionally and conceptually, between the various Hindu and Muslim worlds in which he lived, Hindu society did not always return the compliment. He recognised, in his letter to Ibrahim Khan, that the fact of his being Muslim was, to many Hindus, an offense, no matter how non-communal he was.[23] He occasionally found it hard to find places to live because orthodox Hindus did not want to rent to a Muslim or eat with a Muslim. Perhaps, most tragic is the story of a young Hindu girl, who, being fired up with enthusiasm hearing Nazrul speak and who threw him her necklace in gratitude, was so hounded by Hindu society for showing favour, publicly, to a Muslim that she was eventually forced to commit suicide.[24] Nazrul was critical of this communal consciousness; he was just as scathing about empty Hindu ritual as he was of slavish adherence to Muslim customs. In one of his poems on equality, composed in 1925, he castigates both Hindu priests and Muslim mullahs for their insensitivity and blind faith:

> Your mosques and temples are not meant for man
> Men have no right in them.

21 Ibid., 77.

22 22 August 1938, and two letters on 4 September 1938. See *Najrul-Racanābalī* 9: 266–69.

23 Ibid., 183.

24 Sengupta, *Kāzī Nazrul Islām o Āmār Māmābāḍī,* 62.

> The Mollahs and the Priests
> Have closed their doors under lock and keys.
> . . . .
>
> Comrades,
> Hammer away at the closed doors
> Of those mosques and temples,
> and hit with your shovel mightily,
> For climbing on their minaret,
> The cheats are today glorifying
> Selfishness and hypocrisy.[25]

Up until the end of his active conscious life – Nazrul had a mental breakdown in July 1942 and gradually lapsed into madness and then silence and vacuousness – he advocated for Hindu-Muslim amity and rapprochement. In one of his very last letters, written in the summer of 1942 to Syamaprasad Mukhopadhyay, a Hindu politician who had joined forces with Fazlul Haque to create a Progressive Coalition Ministry to prevent the Muslim League from suing for Partition, Nazrul commended Mukhopadhyay and stated that the only hope for Bengal rested upon this Hindu-Muslim alliance.[26] Nazrul would have despaired to know, however, that the coalition foundered within four months of his letter and that the move towards Partition was by then almost inexorable.

Given that even today this mingling of Hindu and Muslim genres, people, commitments, and devotion is so rare, how can we account for it? To what extent can we call Nazrul a Hindu-Muslim dual belonger? I take three lessons from this material.

I have not found anywhere in Nazrul's poetry or prose anything resembling a coherent philosophical statement about the spiritual unity of all religions, the necessity of formal interreligious dialogue, or the heights of union achieved through mystic realisation. Nor does he label himself as belonging to two religious traditions. The only hint so far that I have been able to find indicating that he thinks of philosophical concepts in relation to communal harmony occurs in a letter written on 21 December 1940, to the conveners of the Calcutta Muslim Student Conference. He writes,

> I am a fakir, a supreme beggar at Allah's door – if I gain strength and mercy from him, inshallah, then the sound of the drum of truth will sound, not in India only but in the whole world. Then the flood of the nectar of the monists, of tauhid, will flow. All men of the world will come together in this advaita doctrine.[27]

25 Translated by Chowdhury, *The Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English Translation,* 261.

26 On 10 July 1942, after Nazrul suffered mental impairment and the loss of his speech, he was sent to Madhupur for treatment. From there he wrote to Syamaprasad Mukhopadhyay, *Najrul-Racanābalī* 9: 274–75.

27 Ibid., 270–71.

Such a statement, joining the Muslim concept of tauhid, or the oneness of God, with the Hindu philosophical notion of monistic awareness, or advaita, demonstrates that Nazrul understood the claims of non-dual experience, from both Muslim and Hindu traditions, and that he found them fruitful in expressing what he hoped, politically, for human understanding and cooperation. Nevertheless, Nazrul was not a systematic theologian or philosopher, and his tolerance was not generally articulated in such language.

What we do see from a reading of his biographies is that Nazrul's non-communal character emerged organically from his life – from those he loved, the people he met, his reading of religious texts, his innate sense of justice, his large-heartedness, and what one might call cultural osmosis. Bengal has always been known as a region in which, until the late nineteenth century, the boundaries between religious traditions were fairly fluid. We have evidence of composite deities, Muslim texts in which new ideas were communicated with Hindu valences, and influential politicians who appealed from the 1920s through the 1940s for political unity between Hindus and Muslims.[28] One can infer then that Nazrul, who grew up in the first two decades of the twentieth century, imbibed some of this bicultural sensitivity. It was in the air, so to speak, even though for most people, the toleration extended to occasional friendships or political alliances, not deep mixing, intermarriage, or engagement with each other's religious traditions. The fact that Nazrul has had so few followers in his dual religious engagements is not to be marvelled at. Not just any poet could have pulled off his most unusual literary experiments or his fully integrated life: they arose from a man with a liberal interpretation of Islam and a non-communal orientation.

Third, I venture to suggest – even if tentatively – that there is something sociologically significant about being a minority, when it comes to an interest in engaging the "other." There is a very small but consistent current in the history of religious literature in India, for instance, of Muslims writing in supposedly "Hindu" genres, such as devotional poetry to Hindu deities, and Christians in India are more apt to reach out for interreligious dialogue with Muslims or Hindus than Hindus are to either Muslims or Christians. Christians in the West who feel attracted to the Hindu tradition typically find that tradition in India itself or through the teachings or publications of India-identifying Hindus; in other words, such Christians are still the "minority" vis-a-vis the Hindus they encounter. Only recently do we find evidence for American Christians (or Jews) learning about and

28 See Tony K. Stewart, trans., *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pīrs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Asim Roy, *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876–1940* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974). Gordon's book contains an excellent chapter on C.R. Das, the leader of the Swaraj Party in the 1920s, which lobbied for Hindu-Muslim amity.

becoming involved in Hindu groups solely on the basis of those groups' American presence and institutions.[29]

Sometimes, the impetus for interaction is not a desire for conversation on religious themes but an argumentative defence of their minority traditions that are under fire from the majority; this is true today among Christians, who live under an anti-Christian and anti-Muslim Hindu-nationalist government in India, and Hindus in the West, who feel that their religious tradition is frequently mis-characterised and wrongly understood by the Christian majority. Although it is beyond the compass of this essay to argue this point satisfactorily, I think it important when considering dual belonging to entertain the relative demographic, and perhaps economic and political, status of the two faith communities relative to each other in the setting of the individual's encounter. Nazrul could reach out to Hindu ideas, themes, deities, and vocabulary because as a member of a minority community, he was exposed to them constantly. I have looked in vain so far for a Hindu who could, or would, cross similar boundaries. In this, I find corroboration for the five points I made in the beginning of this essay: (1) Hindus seem naturally to have taken little interest in minority traditions; (2) if Nazrul had wanted to convert his Hindu friends to Islam, which he decidedly did not, Hindus could have enfolded Muhammad into the *avatāra* system more easily than there would have been space in Islam for what Muslims considered polytheistic Hinduism; and (3, 4, and 5) Muslims and Hindus normatively did not approve of theological, ritual, or social mixing, which is why Nazrul was pilloried so viciously by both communities.

In sum, what the example of Nazrul Islam shows us is not a theological or ritual dual belonging, not the resolution of clashing doctrinal claims about God, but a personal facility in the articulation of, and a comfort, even if frequently challenged, derived from the lived traditions of, a situation into which he was born and thrived.

Growing up with Ramakrishna

Nazrul was a birth dual belonger because of his rich cultural context; I was one because of my parents.

My earliest memory of expressing publicly my inner sense of dual religious belonging was in the third grade, when all the students were asked, one by one, to come to the blackboard and write their religious tradition on it. I don't remember what the point of the exercise was, or what the teacher said upon seeing the array of answers, but I do remember that I was the only hyphenated child. I wrote down, filled with certainty as I recall, "Hindu-Christian."

Michael and Daphne Fell, my father and mother, Canadian and British by birth, were both Anglicans or, once they moved to the United States, Episcopalians. But

29 A wonderful example of this phenomenon is Corinne G. Dempsey, *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

before their marriage and probably before it became fashionable, my father had "turned East" in the 1940s; he met Swami Ashokananda (1893–1969), a direct disciple of Swami Vivekananda, who led the Vedanta Society of Northern California in San Francisco. After some soul-searching, my father entered the monastery run by the Swami. He lasted as a monk for only two years, but that training, and the intensity of his devotion to the ideals of the Ramakrishna Order, stayed with him to the end of his days. My very accommodating mother agreed that my brother and I would be brought up going to the Episcopal Church on Sunday mornings and to the Vedanta Society in Seattle, where we first lived, in the afternoons. I remember sitting on the knee of Swami Vividishananda (1893–1980), who was in charge of the Seattle Center, trips to San Francisco to meet Swami Ashokananda, and visits to the monastery/retreat centre in Trabuco, where many monks were living in retirement. When we moved to Philadelphia when I was in the second grade, our home became the local Vedanta Center, as there was no resident swami;[30] my parents hosted visiting swamis who came to give talks in our house; invited interested devotees for what my mother called weekly "Swami Evenings," when we would listen to tapes of swamis' talks and/or meditate together; and tried, with other interested members of the Philadelphia area, to raise enough money to establish a centre of our own, where a swami could be sent permanently. This did not eventuate, but the pattern of devotion, reverence for the monastic life and proximity to men of God [very rarely did we meet a female renunciant] saturated my upbringing. I believed – I knew – that Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God and that God had incarnated Himself whenever the times dictated; Jesus too had been one such.

All during my elementary and high school years, I was staunchly devoted to the Order, allowing swamis to dictate when (and whether) I dated, following their medical and spiritual advice, travelling to India with a Ramakrishna group when I was 17 in order to see sites associated with Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and Holy Mother, and every summer happily visiting, with my family, the retreat centre at Ganges, Michigan, a satellite of the Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago. Swami Bhashyananda (1917–1996), then the head swami of Chicago, promised my father that he would try to send a swami to start a new centre in Philadelphia.

I must have exasperated my schoolteachers. I remember writing essays about karma. Indeed, it was pain and suffering and the inequities associated with them that made me convinced that the Hindu tradition was "right": only a theory like karma could account for what seemed to be gross injustices of birth, circumstance, and death. Heaven and Hell, even Purgatory, seemed primitive as concepts, by comparison. I was confirmed in my faith in the doctrine of karma by the moving testimony of one of the Seattle Center's devotees, Constance Allshaw, whose only son, a policeman, was killed in a gun battle. His grieving mother took

30 Swami Yatiswarananda (1889–1966) had established a centre in Philadelphia in 1942, but when he left in 1949 it ceased operation.

great comfort from the conviction that by his death, he had worked out something from his past karma and would be reborn with a clearer path to God realisation.

During this period, although the ritual life of the Christian tradition bore me along like a placid, constant stream of water – weekly choir practice, weekly church attendance, the paintings of Jesus in our upstairs meditation room at home, for example – I was imbued with the world of Ramakrishna. I felt that I had never met a Christian of any type who could equal the holiness of the swamis.

I went to college determined to study Religion. I felt, I said to anyone who asked, that my Hindu and Christian sides had greatly expanded my vision but had also left me somewhat intellectually confused. Could I continue to be a "Hindu-Christian"?

In college, much changed. While I continued to revere the monks, I began to question. I remember looking at the concept of karma with new eyes while taking a course on the Philosophy of Religion taught by University of Pennsylvania Professor James Ross. He did me the immense kindness of meeting with me often in office hours and pushing my preconceptions. The only way one can excuse God, or the "law" of karma itself, of injustice is to posit the beginninglessness of the karmic cycle; otherwise, if there is a beginning, then in order to account for difference in beings, now one has to admit that everyone starts out differently.[31] Moreover, what kind of "law" is it that cannot be proven, where one never knows what it is that caused this particular suffering or situation? I wrote a paper on karma for Professor Ross and that was a definitive turning point for me. I did not decide to disbelieve in karma and transmigration in favour of a non-cyclical, Christian view of the afterlife; I just let go of my ardent conviction in the former, which seemed to fall in on itself without any "Christian" influence. I also took academic courses on the Hindu tradition and learnt for the first time that what I called "Hinduism" was actually the teachings and orientation of the Ramakrishna Order, which was in many ways quite different from the "Hinduism" of most other Hindus.

In addition, I started to meet fiery Christians in campus groups – people who showed me that Jesus could be alive in a way that I had never considered or experienced prior to college. I started attending a spirit-filled Episcopal Church in city-centre Philadelphia, and my inner life changed. Slowly, the Christian tradition stopped feeling like a holding environment for Hindu spirituality, and it began to expand into something inspiring in its own account. I never let go of the Hindu-influenced conviction that Jesus was an *avatāra* of God and that he could have "come" to earth more than once. But, in Hindu terms, I began to embrace an "*iṣṭadevatā*," or chosen deity, that was Jesus. This oddity in my belief system prevented me from treading the path to ordination in the Episcopal Church, even

31 Of course, as I would learn later, this point had already been conceded by Śaṁkara in his commentary on the *Brahmasūtras*. For an overview of Śaṁkara's argument, see Francis X. Clooney, "Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedanta's Theology of Karma," *The Journal of Religion* 69, no. 4 (October 1989): 530–48.

though I considered it seriously, as I felt that I would not be able to be "orthodox" enough for any bishop or congregation. Since college, then, I have more or less chosen to be a Christian but one who studies the Hindu tradition – now understood quite capaciously – carefully and with the utmost sympathy.

One thing I notice about my own trajectory: what catalysed or propelled my movements in and out of my youthful, fairly one-sided religious position was people, spiritual teachers, who had ideas for me and who attempted to guide me along specific paths. Whether it was the Episcopal priests I knew, who assured me that the Hindu tradition could not provide ultimate salvation, or the swamis, who counselled me on the spiritual path, I felt caught. When, in college, I told several of the swamis of the Order who were involved with our family that I had decided not to renounce the world, but to marry and enter the "householder" stage, they were unhappy. They assumed that this had been the influence of my "Christian" mother. One responded that I had come into this life with a certain spiritual capital in the bank, and if I did not become a Ramakrishna nun, I would waste it and have to be reborn precisely where I had been in the spiritual ladder. Whom to believe? Like Nazrul, who had to contend with real people interacting sometimes critically with his complex life of multiple commitments, I also, in a smaller way, found the difficult part of dual belonging not free-floating ideas but the teachers and institutional representatives of my variegated religious upbringing.

Conclusion

Was I, am I, a dual belonger? Not, I think, in the way that is aspired to by "convert" believers, who struggle to accommodate a new religious tradition with that of their birth. Perhaps, there is something different about "birth" dual belongers, people who live from their childhoods with the offerings, gifts, and challenges of two traditions, presented in an environment as part of the fabric of life. Like Nazrul, I have chosen to favour certain elements of my religious environment over others, but I do not engage all aspects of both. My commitment is asymmetrical. Like a compounding pharmacist who mixes individual medicines for every patient, each born dual belonger must compound the elements of his or her religious upbringing in a personal synthesis that may include a little more of this and a little less of that. Choice between traditions is not necessary,[32] but choice among aspects of both may be. It is hard to imagine that even "single-tradition" religious people do not do something similar in their own religious lives. Who can claim, live, inhabit, and desire all the many ritual, theological, doctrinal, and ecclesiastical parts of a religious inheritance? In the end, rather than abandon "dual belonging" as a category, perhaps approaching it idiosyncratically, person by person, compound by compound, may be more illuminating.

32 Patrik Fridlund discusses cases studies where exclusive choice is not considered desirable or even needful. See "Double Religious Belonging and Some Commonly Held Ideas about Dialogue and Conversion," *Mission Studies*, 31, no. 2 (2014): 255–79.

References

Ahmed, Rafiuddin. *The Bengal Muslims, 1871–1906: A Quest for Identity*. New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Clooney, Francis X. "Evil, Divine Omnipotence, and Human Freedom: Vedanta's Theology of Karma." *The Journal of Religion* 69, no. 4 (October 1989): 530–48.

Cornille, Catherine, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

———. "Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity – 2012." Santa Clara Lectures 1. https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/sc_lectures/1.

D'Costa, Gavin, and Ross Thompson, eds. *Buddhist-Christian Dual Belonging: Affirmations, Objections, Explorations*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Dempsey, Corinne G. *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Drew, Rose. *Buddhist and Christian? An Exploration of Dual Belonging*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Eaton, Richard. *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*. Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993.

Fridlund, Patrik. "Double Religious Belonging and Some Commonly Held Ideas about Dialogue and Conversion." *Mission Studies* 31, no. 2 (2014): 255–79.

Frykenberg, Robert Eric. *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Fu, Amy Yu. "Rethinking 'Dual Belonging' and a Confucian Christian's Struggle in Late Ming China." *Journal of Ecumencial Studies* 53, no. 1 (Winter 2018): 70–93.

Goel, Sita Ram. *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* New Delhi: The Voice of India, 1988.

———. *History of Hindu-Christian Encounters, AD 304 to 1996*. New Delhi: Voice of India, 1996.

Gordon, Leonard A. *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement, 1876–1940*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1974.

Huda, Mohammad Nurul, ed. *The Poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam in English Translation*. Dhaka: Nazrul Institute, 1997.

Islam, Kazi Nazrul. *Najrul-Racanābalī*, 20 vols. Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 2009.

Keller, Catherine. "Theology's Multitude: Polydoxy Reviewed and Renewed." *Modern Theology* 30, no. 3 (July 2014): 127–39.

Keller, Catherine and Laurel Schneider, eds. *Polydoxy: Theology of Multiplicity and Relation*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

Knitter, Paul. *Without Buddha I Could Not Be Christian*. New York: Oneworld, 2009.

Kopf, David. *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

Lipner, Julius J. *Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: The Life and Thought of a Revolutionary*. New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Raj, Selva J., and Corrine G. Dempsey, eds. *Popular Christianity in India: Riting between the Lines*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002.

Roy, Asim. *The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.

Seitz, Jonathan A. "Religious Dualism and the Problem of Dual Religious Identity." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 35 (2015): 49–55.

Sengupta, Sujātā. *Kāzī Nazrul Islām o Āmār Māmābāḍī*. Hāorāh: Sahajpaṭh, 2012.

Shourie, Arun. *Missionaries in India: Continuities, Changes, Dilemmas*. New Delhi: ASA Publications, 1994.

———. *Harvesting Our Souls: Missionaries, Their Design, Their Claims*. New Delhi: ASA Publications, 2000.

Stewart, Tony K. *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pīrs: Tales of Mad Adventure in Old Bengal*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Tan, Kang-San. "Dual Belonging: A Missiological Critique and Appreciation from an Asian Evangelical Perspective." *Mission Studies* 27, no. 1 (2010): 24–38.

Thompson, Ross. *Buddhist Christianity: A Passionate Openness*. Winchester: John Hunt Publishing, 2010.

7 The comparative theology of Francis X. Clooney SJ and the question of theological dual belonging

Martin Ganeri O.P.

Introduction

Many claims for dual belonging are made by theologians who engage with the religious thought of traditions other than their own. Such claims are not without controversy. For some, a claim for dual belonging involves the full acceptance of two or more conceptually incompatible systems of belief and practice and so such a claim is incoherent. Here, the claim for a theological dual belonging is seen as too strong a claim to be possible. Many claims for theological dual belonging seem, in fact, to be made by those who have really abandoned full commitment to one of the religious traditions to which they claim to belong and so cannot count as properly a form of dual belonging. Unless there has been a full conversion to the other tradition and so at least a new form of single belonging, there results in fact a form of no belonging or syncretism.[1] For others, the claim for theological dual belonging falls short of real belonging, where belonging is taken to be an ethnic or social membership of the concrete communities or institutions of a religious tradition. Here, then, a claim for theological dual belonging is too weak a form of engagement to count as a form of belonging.

In this chapter, I consider the comparative theology of the American Jesuit priest and academic, Francis Xavier Clooney SJ, who has concentrated on a sustained Christian theological engagement with Hinduism. First, I outline the central characteristics of his comparative theology, then consider a case where Clooney has chosen to characterise his comparative theology as a form of dual or multiple religious belonging. Finally, I consider how such a claim for comparative theology compares with wider criteria for religious dual belonging.

1 For such reservations, see Catherine Cornille, "Double Religious Belonging: Aspects and Questions," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 23 (2003): 43–49; and the chapter in this book by Ankur Barua, "The Possibility of Hindu-Christian Dual Belonging: Anthropological Reflections on a Theological Debate."

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-7

The character of the comparative theology of Francis Clooney

In his short, but remarkably comprehensive study, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (2010), Clooney defines comparative theology in general as follows:

> *Comparative theology – comparative* and *theological* beginning to end – marks acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more faith traditions. This learning is sought for the sake of fresh theological insights that are indebted to the newly encountered tradition/s as well as the home tradition.[2]

As he goes on to say, comparative theology is a:

> [r]eflective and contemplative endeavour by which we see the other in the light of our own and our own in the light of the other. It ordinarily starts with the intuition of an intriguing resemblance that prompts us to place two realities – texts, images, practices, doctrines, persons – near one another, so that they may be seen over and over again, side by side. In this necessarily arbitrary and intuitive practice we understand each other differently because the other is near, and by cumulative insight also begin to comprehend related matters differently. Finally, we see ourselves differently, intuitively uncovering dimensions of ourselves that would not otherwise, by a non-comparative logic, come to the fore.[3]

Comparative theology is, then, for Clooney, something that leads to learning and new theological insights, as the content of the theologian's faith is seen differently in the light of the other tradition with which they are engaging and where the theologian's identity as a believing individual is transformed through such encounter.

Behind these statements lies 26 years of Clooney's teaching and publications in the discipline of comparative theology, in which he has developed and articulated his own understanding of comparative theology, which these statements sum up. Thus, among his substantial monographs are: *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (1993), in which he considers Śaṃkara's non-dual Vedānta, set in the context of the later Advaita tradition, compared with the work of the scholastic theologian, Thomas Aquinas and the later Thomist tradition; or *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses*

2 Francis X. Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 10.

3 Ibid., 11.

and the Blessed Virgin Mary (2005), which is a study of three Hindu hymns to the Goddess, compared with three Christian hymns to the Blessed Virgin Mary; or *Beyond Compare: St Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God* (2008), in which he considers two spiritual classics promoting loving surrender to God, the *Treatise on the Love of God* by the Catholic priest and spiritual writer, Francis de Sales and the *Essence of the Three Auspicious Mysteries* by the Śrīvaiṣṇava teacher, Vedānta Deśika. Clooney has continued to produce further monographs since 2010, including *His Hiding Place is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (2013), an exploration of the experience of the absence of the divine beloved in the Biblical *Song of Songs* and the *Holy Word of Mouth* by the Tamil poet-saint Śaṭakōpaṉ, with a number of commentaries on each work; and *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics* (2020), a study of religious and interreligious reading and learning involving a number of Hindu and Christian texts.

One general feature of Clooney's own form of comparative theology is that it entails rigorous scholarly study of Hindu traditions. As he puts in in *Theology After Vedānta*, his comparative theology has striven to be Indological as well as comparative and theological; Indological in the sense that it undertakes a scholarly study of Hindu traditions that represents them accurately.[4] Clooney is himself an accomplished Indologist, able to read Hindu texts in Sanskrit and Tamil, and his work is marked by an impressive study of the traditions with which he engages. A mark of his success is that his work is held in high esteem by other Indologists, even if they have no interest in comparative study as such, as representing an important contribution to Indology itself. For instance, as evidenced in Suthren Hirst's comments on Clooney's work in her non-comparative account, *Śaṃkara's Advaita Vedānta: A way of teaching*,[5] Clooney's study of Advaita Vedānta in *Theology After Vedānta* has been recognised as an important modern insight into the textual character of Advaita Vedānta as an intellectual and soteriological tradition: the way the Vedānta itself is woven as a kind of greater "Text" from the many layers of the original scriptural revelation and subsequent commentaries and subcommentaries; centred on forms of textual reasoning, exegetical and other textual strategies for understanding and linking the sacred texts and commentaries together; and in which spiritual insight into truth comes only through transformative engagement with the Vedānta Text itself.[6]

A second feature of Clooney's comparative theology is that he concentrates on very close study of a limited number of texts from Hindu and Christian religious traditions. Clooney emphasises that his comparative theology is an undertaking

4 Francis X. Clooney, *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 1–14.

5 Jacqueline Suthren Hirst, *Śaṃkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching* (Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005), 182.

6 Clooney, *Theology After Vedānta*, 37–152.

that sticks to small-scale experiments in patient and slow study of texts, focused on what the texts are about and how they are understood within their particular traditions, then carefully compared with each other:

> This is a theology that thrives not on its theoretical clarity or comprehensive reach, but in the small, practical choices a theologian in fact makes regarding what to read, what to compare in which combination, and what lessons to draw from what she does in this way. In this intentional narrowness there is disclosed a great breadth; specific choices open possibilities across a broad spectrum of religious realities.[7]

For Clooney, as we have noted, the particular choice of texts is determined usually by some striking similarity, a resonance we might say, that causes the theologian to want to study them together. It is a choice, moreover, that reflects the particular background and interests of the theologian, what they find interesting and attractive to study and reflect on.

What emerges from this scholarly and painstaking study of individual Hindu texts is Clooney's understanding of comparative theology as comparative reading. This is really the heart of his work and his contribution to Christian theological engagement with Hinduism. For Clooney, theology is primarily the patient and contemplative reading of texts and comparative theology expands this to include texts from another religious tradition. As he puts it:

> In my view, the foremost prospect for a fruitful comparative theology is the reading of texts, preferably scriptural and theological texts that have endured over centuries and millennia, and that have guided communities in their understanding of God, self and other. If we wish to learn and be changed by what we learn, we are unlikely to find another practice as reliably rich and fruitful as such reading. Just as we can learn religiously by going to a temple or hearing sacred recitation, comparative practice occurs when *acts* of reading have been undertaken, as we read back and forth across religious borders, examining multiple texts, individually but then too in the light of another.[8]

The type of reading Clooney has in mind is much more than just the academic study of texts, where texts are translated and analysed, but where the content of the texts remains external to the one studying them. Rather, the type of reading Clooney has in mind is a discipline of spiritual reading in which the contents of the text do affect the one who studies the text, where the text changes what the theologian thinks about "God, self and other," where the text becomes part of the identity of the theologian studying it.

7 Clooney, *Comparative Theology,* 87.
8 Ibid., 58.

As a model for what he has in mind, Clooney points to the work of Paul Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (1999), in which such reading as characterised by a respect for the richness and depths of meaning to be found in the texts and an openness to being transformed by them. Such reading does reconstitute the identity of the reader:

> The reader is as it were reconstituted in relation to the text, re-created as a person who learns-by-study, a "homo lector." Learning to be and act as this *homo lector* is not a neutral or cost-free activity; it entails a combination of innate capacities with prolonged study and spiritual practice, self-effacement before the text, patience, perseverance, and imagination. This humble practice changes readers, as they are inevitably drawn into the world brought to life in their reading.[9]

This is the type of religious reading that has been traditionally cultivated in different religious communities, where the texts studied are relatively few, highly revered as guides to right religious thinking and practice, and where such study was often characterised by memorisation of large amounts of text, detailed commentary on texts, and an attentive awareness of the connections and resonances of one text with another.

In keeping with this, in *Theology After Vedānta*, Clooney suggests that a more precise name for comparative theology might be *collectio* – "reading-together:"

> One may also concede that "comparative" may not be the right word for describing what actually goes on in the reading of texts and therefore in this book, where the engaged reader is "inscribed" into an ever more complexly composed context, in order to write after and out of it. The distance one might normally associate with comparison is lacking; the images of visual assessment often associated with comparing – looking at things together – are inappropriate. Perhaps another Latin word, "collectio" – "reading together" – might be rehabilitated for this purpose.[10]

The choice of this Latin term, *collectio*, is deliberate, for it points us to the tradition of contemplative, transformative reading of sacred texts known in the Christian tradition as *lectio* or *lectio divina*. This tradition is a Christian instantiation of the kind of religious reading Griffiths considers and serves as the basis for traditional Christian meditation and then scriptural commentary. Comparative theology as *collectio* extends that discipline of *lectio* now to include sacred texts from other traditions.

In *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics*, Clooney has returned to reconsider and further articulate the fundamental principles of his comparative

9 Ibid., 58.

10 Clooney, *Theology After Vedānta*, 7.

theology as a reading together of texts from different religious traditions, a form of religious reading that becomes a form of interreligious reading.[11] The whole book is, in fact, an exploration of and exhortation to a traditional form of religious reading of the great books of different traditions, where texts are read slowly and where the resultant learning is also a slow process, but which is extended in this case to interreligious reading and learning. The Hindu and Christian texts Clooney chooses demand of their readers a form of reading that works slowly through the texts step by step and where any learning that occurs arises only when the reader remains close to the text. These texts defy any attempt to summarise their contents and leave the texts behind in order to move on to other forms enquiry.[12] The Hindu and Christian texts exemplify the ways in which religious texts and their reading serve to instruct, enquire into doctrine, or draw their readers into a participation into the religious realities of which the texts speak. As such, comparative or interreligious reading serves to re-enforce the focus on the nature and value of traditional religious reading itself as found separately in each tradition, but reading Christian and Hindu texts together now adds an extra dimension that would not have been present when read on their own.[13]

The comparative religious reading or *collectio* that Clooney promotes draws the theologian into the two worlds of the different texts themselves. The co-presence of texts from a number of traditions in the mind of the theologian is a changed fact about the theologian. The theologian comes to dwell in two different traditions because those two traditions now dwell within that theologian, open to the creative possibilities of such co-presence, as it leads to a change in the identity of the theologian, as it changes what they think and know about God and human approaches to God, changes what they believe and what spiritual practices they undertake.

Clooney's claims for what is learnt tend to be quite modest and careful. Thus, in *Beyond Compare*, Clooney finds the two texts to be complete self-contained guides in themselves to loving surrender to God, resisting any attempt or need to synthesise them. Reading them together serves to make us appreciate more fully the fundamental tension that exists between the positive role doctrinal tradition and theological reasoning have and the awareness that the goal lies beyond this in the actual act and experience of surrender to God, that there is a tension between "theology *about* God and theology in encounter *with* God."[14] Reading them together itself encourages us to seek this goal of loving surrender to God

11 Francis X. Clooney, *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics: Why and How Deep Learning Still Matters* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 21.

12 Clooney, *Reading*, 115–16.

13 Ibid., 152.

14 Francis X. Clooney, *Beyond Compare: St Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 43.

with greater intensity, a goal beyond each text and beyond the comparative reading itself:

> This project is "beyond comparison;" it is concerned rather with the further step occurring when a reader (who may also become a writer) takes the texts of two traditions to heart, reading them together with a vulnerability to their power and purpose precisely so as to be doubly open to the transformations their authors intended to instigate in readers. If, in this light, we discover a new situation *after* and *beyond* the myriad comparisons that occur along the way, we might nonetheless have achieved some fruitful comparative insight; but such is not the primary purpose of this engagement in a double reading of loving surrender.[15]

Of course, someone could come to the goal of loving surrender through reading just one text, through staying in just one tradition, but the comparative theologian finds the kindred text from another tradition a powerful and helpful guide when the two texts are read together. In *His Hiding Place is Darkness*, a study that follows on thematically from *Beyond Compare*, Clooney finds that exploring the Christian and Hindu experiences of the absence of the divine beloved through reading the *Song of Song*s and *The Holy Word of Mouth* together leaves the Christian theologian committed to a relationship with Christ as the one and only love, but at the same time aware that there are other claims for similar experiences within Hinduism.[16]

Such comparative reading can also lead to the creative retrieval of the theologian's home tradition. Reading a text from another tradition and then going back to a text from the theologian's home tradition leads to a re-reading of that text, in which there is a retrieval and often a new emphasis on aspects of that text which otherwise might be neglected. Thus, in *Theology After Vedānta*, the textual character of Advaita leads Clooney to retrieve the textual character of the *Summa Theologiae* of Aquinas, the pedagogical nature of the text, which is intended to school and transform its reader, when read as whole and in the order in which it was written, rather than treated as a mine for doctrines and reasoned arguments taken out of context. Of course, such retrieval can take place without such comparative reading, as is evidenced for instance in the work of the contemporary Thomist theologian Mark Jordan, who in *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas after His readers* (2007) without comparative study has argued for the retrieval of the *Summa Theologiae* as a single pedagogical text, to which, as he puts it, the reader should "lend one's lived time to the retelling of the text's narrative, to the re-enactment of its teaching."[17]

15 Ibid., 27.

16 Francis X. Clooney, *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013), 139–41.

17 Mark Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 31.

But the way the comparative theologian carries out this retrieval is through and after reading texts from another tradition, doing their theology *after* Vedānta.

Such comparative reading can lead to a new perspective on one's home tradition, as it is read in the light of the other. Thus, in *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother*, Clooney explores how reading texts about the Goddess as a powerful figure, who has all the attributes of full divinity, impacts on Christian reflection on Mary and also on God. A Christian reader will not then make Mary into a goddess, but rather see more clearly the particular status of the Blessed Virgin Mary as a human being who is not divine, but whose relationship to the divine is very close as the Mother of God, a powerful figure who communicates to others the power of her Son, the source of love and consolation and an advocate for others in heaven. The Hindu depictions of the divine as female may not lead to a Christian reader worshipping God as Goddess, but it might lead the Christian reader to reflect on issues to do with gender and deity and on the choices made within the Christian tradition. Moreover, with regard to the concern of contemporary feminist theologians and philosophers of religion to explore a female depiction both of deity and the goals of human life, the particular Hindu depiction of the Goddess in these hymns resonates with many of the distinctive features of their accounts, while also providing a source for fuller reflection and articulation of such accounts.[18]

In *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics*, Clooney also explores the idea of participation as a fruit of comparative reading. By participation, he means an experience of the realities being talked about in the texts themselves:

> Our texts instruct, and they disclose truth. But traditions intent upon knowledge and truth want more than the intellectual assent of their readers. Rather, instruction and doctrine are meant also to draw readers into the communities they visit in their reading, become participants who re-enact as their own the words they read. This eventually becomes all the more apparent when spiritual classics actively draw readers into participation by words that appeal to heart as well as mind.[19]

Clooney considers here the *Admirable Secret of the Most Holy Rosary*, a treatise on the Rosary, a Catholic Marian devotion centred on the mysteries of the life of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin Mary, by the French Catholic spiritual writer and pastor Louis de Montfort and the *One Hundred Linked Verses on the Holy Word of Mouth*, by Maṇavāḷamāmuni, which distils elements from the *Holy Word of Mouth* by Śaṭakōpaṉ and is thus centred on the experience of the absence of Viṣṇu by a female devotee. Both these works instruct their readers in the truth of what they talk about, but also, by means of evocative language, engage the affections or heart of their readers.

18 Francis X. Clooney, *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 223–37.

19 Clooney, *Reading*, 118–19.

Both these works are meant to draw their readers into participation in the devotional practices of their traditions and thereby to come to an experience of the realities to which they point. Informed and inspired by reading the *Admirable Secret*, the reader should be led through praying the rosary to a greater participation in the mysteries of Christ's life and that of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Informed and inspired by the *Linked Verses*, the reader should be drawn through the singing of the Linked Verses into the drama of the intense experience of the presence and absence of Viṣṇu by his devotees. When these texts are then read together, this opens up the further possibility that, in some sense, the reader comes to have an experience of the devotion and of the theological realities to which both texts point. As Clooney puts it:

> If we have studied, or begun to, we will find the rosary and Maṇavāḷamāmuni's verses resonating in our memories together, and we will find ourselves on the edge (or precipice) of praying the rosary and of singing Maṇavāḷamāmuni's verses, participating because we have learned our texts well and taken to heart. Those who respect boundaries and have learned in a careful and attentive manner know better how to negotiate, in the text, the coherent path to be traveled now twice over.[20]

Reflecting on this suggestion by Clooney, and as the last sentence intimates, we would have to say that the nature and outcomes of such a dual engagement would need careful consideration and negotiation. What it means for a Catholic reader to engage with the Hindu text and experience the devotional reality to which it points, or vice versa for a Hindu reader to engage with the Christian text and experience the reality to which it points, is not going to be the same as for the Hindu reader of the Hindu text or the Christian reader of the Christian text. Any such experience will be accommodated and assimilated into the doctrinal world of the reader's own tradition, which will determine the nature of the final experience each reader has. As we saw in *His Hiding Place*, such dual participation does not entail that the reader ceases to give up on the particularity of their commitments to one tradition and to the theological realities of that tradition.

Comparative theology and multiple religious belonging

In most of his writing, Clooney does not use the language of dual or multiple religious belonging as such. However, in a chapter entitled, "God for Us" in Catherine Cornille's book, *Many Mansions: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (2002), reproduced in *Comparative Theology*, Clooney does talk about comparative theology as a form of multiple religious identity or belonging.

20 Ibid., 150.

Clooney's starting point is a modern life of the ninth-century Śrīvaiṣṇava saint, Antal, and a verse about her that has drawn Clooney's attention and interest. Antal maintains that she is betrothed to Lord Nārāyaṇa, but as she goes to Nārāyaṇa's temple to be married, others doubt that this can be true. In response, she utters the following verse:

Whichever form pleases his people, that is his form;
Whichever name pleases his people, that is his name;
Whichever way pleases his people who meditate without ceasing,
That is his way, the one who holds the discus.[21]

This verse suggests that Nārāyaṇa accommodates himself to whatever form his devotees find helpful to them to worship him. If Antal imagines herself as the bride of Nārāyaṇa, then he will come to her as bridegroom.

At the outset Clooney identifies how this verse has led him to see comparative theology as leading to multiple religious belonging:

> My hypothesis is that in contemplation we construct a path of religious belonging that suits our own spiritual imagining; we do this according to our traditions but also the possibilities available in our time and place. In all of this, God agrees to meet us there; if our contemplation happens to cross religious boundaries, God agrees to meet us there too.[22]

Clooney takes us through the theological journey that brings him to this position. First, he explores the wider context of this verse in the texts and theology of the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition. It turns out to be a verse in a work, the *Mutal Tiruvantāṭi*, by another Tamil saint, Poykai Āḻvār, a work teaching that out of compassion God accommodates himself to the needs of his devotees. As part of this, this verse emphasises that in meditation, God accommodates himself to the form the meditator imagines God. Clooney then further traces commentaries on this text as well as other texts in the Śrīvaiṣṇava tradition, in which this verse is linked to other key texts, such as *Bhagavad Gītā* 4:11 ("However someone takes refuge in me, in that way do I favour them") and to the making of material images of God as well as meditative forms. What emerges is a consistent theology of divine accommodation out of compassion to the forms human beings create of God, whether in their meditation or in their material art.

This becomes something that is attractive to Clooney himself becomes the way he himself comes to see God. As he puts it:

> As I traced the verse in its various contexts, I was learning to think and imagine along with the commentators, and to see more vividly for myself the

21 Clooney, *Comparative Theology*, 129.
22 Ibid., 130.

> possibilities opened by the verse and its logic of human-divine accommodation: the promises made by Nārāyaṇa to these Hindu writers come alive as promises I can at least imagine as promises to me as well.[23]

Clooney then turns back to consider his own Christian tradition in order to see what possibilities and limits it establishes for any creative engagement with the Hindu tradition that he has found attractive. Clooney turns to the Jesuit tradition of the Ignatian *Spiritual Exercises*, central to the spirituality of the Society of Jesus and centred around visualisation of God in Christ and in the scenes of Christ's life in the Gospels.

The practitioner of the Ignatian *Exercises* is instructed to visualise the different aspects of the scenes of Christ's life, to enter into them and through this imaginative construction and participation, to become affected by them, and thereby to bear spiritual fruit from this practice. The *Exercises* emphasise that there can and should be a direct encounter with God and that it is better served if the practitioner develops their own images rather being constrained by traditional images or over-direction by the retreat giver:

> Fifteenth Annotation: But while one is engaged in the Spiritual Exercises, it is more suitable and better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate Himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will. That He inflame it with His love and praise, and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future. Therefore, the director of the Exercises, as a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to one side or the other, should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord.[24]

Moving on to modern reflection on the *Exercises* by Roland Barthes and Richard Blake SJ, Clooney notes how they both stress the way the *Exercises* call for a kind of emptying of the mind of the practitioner of traditional images, so that their own individual and new images can arise. The elasticity of the *Exercises* means that there is an inherent openness for the practitioner to form these new images in whatever context they find themselves, using the imaginative resources that are of interest or concern to themselves as an individual, the "possibilities available in our time and place" as Clooney puts it.

What strikes Clooney is that these two traditions of meditation have considerable similarities, even though they remain clearly different. They both encourage a creative form of imagination suited to the individual practitioner and supported by a theology of direct encounter with God in such meditation. They both identify the desire of God to meet the individual in the context of their own individual imagination and the images they create for themselves.

23 Ibid., 139.
24 Ibid., 142–43.

In keeping with his understanding of comparative theology, for Clooney, the encounter between these two traditions is primarily one of reading together the texts and of the creative effect this has on the imagination of a reader like himself, how such reading causes a multiple belonging to arise in the reader:

> My choice has been to stress rather that multiple religious belonging is in important ways as accessible and ordinary as any process of attentive reading. Reading across boundaries is not entirely different from religious reading within particular religious traditions.

This religious reading offers a renewed contemplative practice that complexifies and deepens how we imagine and see God. We are what we read, and if we read in complex ways, we become persons with complex religious identities.[25]

Clooney argues that in this way, we learn more about God and about how God relates to us. We do a theology in which faith seeks and gains greater understanding. Above all, from the encounter with the Hindu tradition comes a fuller insight into the idea that God wants to accommodate himself to the individual and to how they approach God. For Clooney, this includes a confidence that God will accommodate himself to meet those who approach God in a manner that now crosses over religious boundaries, a confidence that comparative theology is something pleasing to God. In this way, the journey that started out with being struck by a verse in a Hindu text affirms for Clooney the project of comparative theology itself, as well as deepens his insight into who God is and how God acts.

We can see here the different aspects of the learning that Clooney sees emerging from comparative theology: the co-presence of texts from different tradition in the mind of the theologian, the retrieval of aspects of the texts from the theologian's own tradition, such as the individualistic nature of religious imaging and the encounter with God in that individualistic imagination; and the re-reading of one's own tradition, in the light of the insight into the way God actively accommodates himself to encounter the individual. Thereby, as he puts it, "we construct a path of religious belonging," one that here happens to involve a multiple belonging.

What kind of dual belonging does comparative theology bring about?

Clooney's understanding and practice of comparative theology is, then, something that is content with relatively modest goals and yet one that does reconstitute the work and identity of the theologian. For Clooney, a form of religious belonging is brought about by the contemplative reading of texts, which forms the spiritual imagination of the one doing this reading. For Clooney, then, the definition of religious belonging could be said to be any form of adherence to a religious tradition that comes about through and insofar as religious reading in that tradition

25 Ibid., 147.

has an effect on the identity of the reader. When the theologian engages in reading across a number of religious traditions, this brings about a form of multiple religious belonging.[26]

Whether this is more widely counted as a form of dual belonging depends clearly on what the criteria for dual belonging are held to be. In his chapter for this book, D'Costa argues that religious belonging is dependent on meeting the criteria for such belonging present in the religious community to which a person might claim to belong, or on the religious community accepting that someone can still be said to belong to it, if the relationship to that community has been modified in the course of taking on another religious identity. Thus, in the case of D'Costa's depiction of Manu – a Hindu man who becomes a Catholic Christian, but who retains a strong sense of the value of elements of Hindu religious culture for his own religious identity and for that of his fellow Catholics, and who has integrated these Hindu elements into his Catholic identity in such a way that this meets the criteria within the Catholic Church for genuine belonging to Catholic Christianity – whether or not Manu can still be said to belong to the Hindu community is a matter for the Hindu community itself to affirm or not. That Manu has integrated these Hindu elements is what D'Costa also calls an act of Christian inculturation into Hinduism, within a modern Catholic understanding of inculturation as the recognition of elements that are true, good, and holy in non-Christian cultures but also their transformation as they come into contact with Christianity.[27]

If such criteria for dual belonging are accepted, how might the comparative theology of Clooney be appraised in terms of any claim to dual belonging? If the criterion for dual belonging is acceptance by each of the two communities, then this is a question that can in the final analysis only be answered by those two communities, even if we can make some observations based on criteria that have otherwise been advanced by those communities for belonging. Since Clooney remains a fully practising member of the Catholic Christian community and his engagement with the Hindu tradition does not entail the rejection of any doctrinal position required for full belonging, then we should readily affirm his full belonging to the Catholic Christian community. Full membership of the Hindu community would ordinarily entail much more than the type of engagement undertaken here. Clooney is not, however, making any claim to full membership, but only to a limited belonging which comes about through a meditative form of reading of a text and which leads to an expanded understanding of God informed by that text. Whether that is also accepted by the Hindu community as a form of belonging is a question that members of that community have to answer. By analogy, this same question arises in many areas where individuals may claim to belong to a particular community, whether it

26 Ibid., 130, 147.

27 Gavin D'Costa, "Considering the Case of Catholic-Hindu Dual Belonging from a Magisterial and Dogmatic Point of View," In this volume (2021).

be on religious grounds, or national, cultural, or ethnic grounds, or otherwise, but where what has otherwise counted as full membership is not immediately present for some reason.[28]

Leaving aside this question, might what Clooney undertakes be characterised as a form of inculturation? It certainly seems that the engagement with Hinduism is a recognition of the true, good, and holy in the Hindu culture with which he engages and that this is integrated into Clooney's Christian identity. There is a process of transformation that has taken place. However, if it is a case of inculturation, it is a way of understanding inculturation that expands how this has been understood historically. Christian inculturation has ordinarily been taken to describe Christian engagement with a non-Christian culture in a particular region, in order to present Christianity in a way that corresponds better to the culture of that area and to communicate Christianity more naturally to those in that culture.[29] What Clooney undertakes, however, is an engagement with an element of Hindu culture by an American theologian in the United States and concerned to deepen the theological culture in America.

So, the use of the term, "inculturation," as such, might tend to obscure the particular nature of what is undertaken by Clooney. Although Clooney's comparative theology shares some of the features that inculturation has and may serve to distinguish it from some forms of dual belonging where there is a lack of integration, it is better simply left described as a form of theological engagement with elements from another religious culture. If an earlier parallel for this is Christian engagement with Greek philosophy, then the Christian Scholastic engagement with such philosophy in the Medieval period is a closer parallel than that of the first Christian centuries. The spread of Christianity in the early centuries from Palestine to the world of the Roman empire and the engagement with Greek philosophy was a form of inculturation, since Greek philosophy was part of the dominant non-Christian Greco-Roman culture into which Christianity entered and to which it sought to communicate. In the Medieval period, however, the new engagements with Greek philosophy that took place, whether directly or via engagement with Arabic or Jewish engagement with it, was with elements of Greek philosophical thought, in order to deepen the theological culture of a Europe which was no

28 In his fuller study of Christian-Buddhist dual belonging, D'Costa locates Clooney's comparative theology as a form of dual belonging where there is exterior membership of one tradition (here of course the Catholic Christian tradition) and an interior engagement and appreciation of elements of another tradition. This contrasts with a form of dual belonging where there is no exterior membership of either tradition, but interior engagement with elements from two traditions, or a form of dual belonging where exterior membership of both traditions is attempted. (D'Costa, "Assessing Catholic-Buddhist Dual Belonging in the Light of the Catholic Magisterium," in *Philosophical and Theological Responses to Syncretism*, eds. Mika Vähäkangas and Patrik Fridlund (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 104–62.

29 The call for such inculturation into Indian, as well as other, traditions continues to be made in modern official Catholic teaching, for instance, in the encyclical of Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), paragraph 72. www.vatican.va.

longer a Greco-Roman culture in the sense that it was in the first centuries of the Common Era.[30]

Conclusion

The kind of comparative theology undertaken by Clooney is clearly not making any claim to a full adherence to two different total systems of belief and practice. Moreover, it tends to emphasise a clear commitment to the theologian's first religious affiliation, even while very open to what can be gained from encounter with the other tradition. Thus, Clooney's comparative theology is not making an impossible and incoherent claim to a dual belonging to two complete and incompatible traditions nor does it have to lead to a loss of any religious belonging or to syncretism.

The claim Clooney makes for dual belonging is really just one way of expressing the kind of adherence that interreligious reading itself brings about. The primary goal of his comparative theology is to engage in the project of interreligious reading itself and to see where it leads the person who does it. Thus, talk of dual belonging could easily be dropped and indeed should be dropped, if controversy over whether the form of adherence Clooney has in mind is strong enough to count as dual belonging threatens to obscure the nature and value of Clooney's project of interreligious reading itself.

Other terms might also be advanced to express the form of adherence that comparative theology brings about, if a claim to any form of belonging to the Hindu tradition is not accepted by members of that community. In his chapter for this book, Long suggests that the term "participation" might better serve to express any form of religious activity or belief that draws on two or more religious traditions.[31] As we have noted, Clooney also talks of participation in *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics*. For Clooney, this participation is a way of characterising what he means by belonging, one way that reading in any tradition affects the reader and draws them into a relationship with what is being studied.

Whatever term is finally adopted or accepted, Clooney's comparative theology represents a constructive and creative, and indeed a very respectful, engagement by a Christian theologian with Hindu traditions. It shows the concrete gains to be had from such contemporary engagement, as something that is also in continuity with earlier Christian encounter with non-Christian thought over the centuries, such as the engagement of medieval Christian theology with Greek, Arab, and Jewish thoughts.

30 In *Fides et Ratio* (1998, paragraph 43) the theological engagement or dialogue with Arab and Jewish thought that took place in the work of Thomas Aquinas during this period is held up as a model for contemporary theological engagement with non-Christian thought.

31 Jeffery D. Long, *Hindu, Christian, Hindu-Christian, and Beyond Exploring the Relations between Identity and Spirituality* (this volume).

References

Clooney, Francis Xavier S.J. *Theology After Vedānta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993.

———. *Divine Mother, Blessed Mother: Hindu Goddesses and the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

———. *Beyond Compare: St Francis de Sales and Śrī Vedānta Deśika on Loving Surrender to God*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008.

———. *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

———. *His Hiding Place Is Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013.

———. *Reading the Hindu and Christian Classics: Why and How Deep Learning Still Matters*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2020.

Griffiths, Paul. *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Jordan, Mark. *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas after His Readers*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Paul II, Pope John. *Fides et Ratio*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 1998.

Suthren Hirst, Jacqueline G. *Śaṃkara's Advaita Vedānta: A Way of Teaching*. Abingdon, Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2005.

8 Non-dual conversion and non-dual belonging

Trajectories of religious transformation in missionary Advaita Vedānta

Reid B. Locklin

The past several decades have witnessed a renewed scholarly interest in Hinduism as a "missionary religion," with special focus on such devotional traditions as the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), Yoga and meditation movements, and various strands of Vedānta.[1] Leaders in these movements frequently articulate, along with their more or less explicit missionary agendas, a no less explicit disavowal of any intention to convert persons from other religious traditions. Many insist that Hinduism honours all paths equally, in a relationship of mutual harmony. Such insistence shades, in many cases, into sharp critique and even polemic. Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) famously criticised any form of proselytisation as a betrayal of authentic religion,[2] and the influential Advaitin teacher Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930–2015) wrote an open letter to the leader of world Catholicism in 1999 entitled simply, "Conversion is Violence."[3] Drawing a sharp contrast to such "non-aggressive," non-proselytising religions as Hinduism, Dayananda argues that "religions that are committed by their theologies to convert . . . are necessarily aggressive, since conversion implies a conscious intrusion into the religious life of a person, in fact, into the religious person."[4]

Notwithstanding such criticisms, historians and sociologists have well documented the efforts of various Hindu movements and organisations to intrude into

1 E.g. Reinhart Hummel, *Indische Mission und neue Frömmigkeit in Westen: Religiöse Bewegungen Indiens in westlichen Kulturen* (Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1980); Klaus K. Klostermaier, "'In Every Town, Country and Village My Name Will be Sung': Hindu Missions in India and Abroad," in *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality, Missions*, eds. Jamie S. Scott and Gareth Griffiths (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 173–202; Arvind Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011); Ferdinando Sardella, "Hinduism," in *World Religions and Their Missions*, ed. Aaron J. Ghiloni (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 153–81.

2 See Sebastian C.H. Kim, *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 23–36.

3 Swami Dayananda Saraswati, "An Open Letter to Pope John Paul II: Conversion is Violence," *Indian Express*, 29 October 1999, https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/conversion-is-violence/.

4 Ibid.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-8

persons' religious lives in precisely this way, by attracting new members and disseminating their teachings to a wider, international public. "In fact," writes Carl Jackson, in reference to the international Ramakrishna Mission, "thousands of Americans have joined the Vedanta societies since 1893, in the process abandoning Christianity for a modern variety of Hinduism. Despite all protestations, the swamis appear to work as missionaries of Hinduism in the West."[5] This raises the question: do these movements aim for conversion, or do they not?

Reinhart Hummel addresses this point of tension by differentiating between conversion as a gradual transformation of religious milieu and transfer of primary loyalties, on the one hand, and conversion as a decisive break and shift from one religious group to another, on the other hand.[6] From a four-year study of a Kripalu Yoga Ashram in eastern Pennsylvania, Stephen R. Wilson has similarly suggested that conversion should be understood as a complex, cumulative process of "resocialization" and "deconditioning," "a process where basic habitual and problematic ways of perceiving the world and oneself, resulting from early childhood conditioning, are eliminated."[7] The Jesuit sociologist Rudolf C. Heredia, for his part, differentiates between *ātmaparivartan*, "a metanoia, or a change of heart, within the same religious tradition" and *dharmāntar*, "a change in one's religious allegiance across such tradition," as well as between conversion by "aggressive and organised proselytization" and "conversion by gradual absorption and integration."[8] All three scholars suggest that many Hindu traditions do indeed seek new converts, but they do so in a way that troubles common understandings of conversion, as a social and religious phenomenon.

Informed by these and related proposals, I attempt in this essay to explore the theology of conversion that emerges from just one strand of contemporary missionary Hinduism: the non-dualist tradition of Advaita Vedānta. First, I offer a brief survey of several theological and social-scientific treatments of conversion as a cross-cultural phenomenon. Then, in two subsequent sections, I develop an outline of conversion in these traditions, rooted in various conversion narratives and the teachings of prominent Vedānta missionaries, such as Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) and Swami Chinmayananda (1916–1993). Missionary Advaita, I suggest, does advance a specific understanding of conversion, albeit one that proceeds by the gradual transformation and perfection of rival religious views rather than their explicit exclusion. The result is a form of religious belonging that is neither exclusive nor multiple, but precisely non-dual, in a way distinctively well suited to the teaching of Advaita Vedānta on the ultimate non-difference (*a-dvaita*) of self, God and world.

5 Carl S. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 74.

6 Hummel, *Indische Mission*, 17–18, 239–40.

7 Stephen R. Wilson, "Becoming a Yogi: Resocialization and Deconditioning as Conversion Process," *Sociological Analysis* 45, no. 4 (1984): 301–14, quotation at 303.

8 Rudolf C. Heredia, *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2007), 8, 13.

Theological and social-scientific perspectives on conversion

Before delving into Advaita narratives and theologies of conversion, it may be worth reflecting briefly on the semantic breadth of our key term. In public discourse and even in the writings of some theologians, religious conversion is not infrequently reduced to a change in ritual, belief, and institutional commitment – the rejection of one form of religious belonging for another, different one. This does not reflect a settled understanding of the concept, however, even in the Christian traditions with which it continues to be most closely associated. It is telling, for example, that the Latin and Greek terms that inform most Christian understandings of conversion, including *convertere, strepho, epistrepho,* and *metanoia*, relate closely to the Hebrew term, *shub*, "to turn, to return."[9] *Shub* refers, first and foremost to the activity of turning back – to God, to God's covenant with Israel, and to a path from which one had previously strayed. Only by extension does this come to mean something like a change in institutional affiliation. Most fundamentally, it evokes communal and individual disciplines of repentance, renewal, and return.

One Christian theologian who has taken this clarification very much to heart is the Canadian Jesuit Bernard J.F. Lonergan (1904–1984). In his 1971 work *Method in Theology*, Lonergan proposed that human living unfolds on four fundamental levels of consciousness: experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.[10] Conversion, stated simply, consists of a radical reorientation at one or more levels of consciousness, "a transformation of the subject and his [*sic*] world."[11] Such transformation involves a change of "horizon," an opening of new possibilities of thought and action; it "begins a new sequence that can keep revealing ever greater depth and breadth and wealth." As such, it is typically experienced as an "about-face" and "new beginning."[12] At the level of understanding, "intellectual conversion" involves a transformation from "naïve realism" to "critical realism."[13] At the level of decision, "Moral conversion changes the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values"; and, at its furthest extent, such moral conversion opens into "religious conversion," variously described as "being grasped by ultimate concern," as "other-worldly falling in love," or as "total and permanent self-surrender without conditions, qualifications, reservations."[14]

One of the most striking elements of Lonergan's vision of religious transformation is its vertical orientation. Walter Conn notes that, "In this approach,

9 Frank K. Flinn, "Conversion: Up from Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience," in *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, eds. Christopher Lamb and M. Darroll Bryant (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 51–52.

10 Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J., *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 6–20.

11 Ibid., 130.

12 Ibid., 237–38.

13 Ibid., 238–40.

14 Ibid., 240.

conversion is viewed from the perspective of structure rather than content, and may be understood as a *vertical* conversion: radically new questions creatively restructuring content (old or new) into a totally new horizon."[15] In his account of intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, Lonergan adopted the language of sublation, such that each level of conversion "goes beyond" the previous one, while also carrying lower levels "forward to a fuller realization within a richer context."[16] Though it seems safe to presume that Lonergan positions baptism and Christian commitment as the ordinary *telos* of authentic conversion, emphasis falls squarely on the interior transformation of a person within – or without – any particular tradition.

Social scientific studies of conversion also frequently draw a distinction between institutional conversion and individual transformation. Lewis Rambo, for example, adopts a self-consciously holistic method that incorporates insights from sociology, anthropology, psychology, and theology.[17] From this broad foundation, Rambo treats conversion as "a process over time, not a single event."[18] Conversion, on his reading, includes not only what he calls "tradition transition" or movement between religious traditions but also intensification or new affiliation within a home tradition, institutional movement within a broader family of traditions, such as denominations of Christianity, and also defection or apostasy.[19] Finally, although Rambo distinguishes seven successive stages of conversion as a single process, he also notes that "there is sometimes a spiraling effect – a going back and forth between stages."[20]

Building on the process-oriented contributions of Rambo, among others, the anthropologist Henri Gooren has advanced a similarly synthetic account of "conversion careers," comprehending "all episodes of higher or lower participation in one or more religious organizations during a person's life."[21] Arguably, Gooren's key insight is his decoupling of his own process perspective from any necessary teleology. Rather than Rambo's scheme of seven stages, Gooren proposes five levels of participation in a religious tradition, including *preaffiliation* and *disaffiliation* at the lowest levels, and moving upwards through mere institutional *affiliation* and deeper *conversion* to *confession* or "core member identity" at the highest level.[22] In its narrow sense, as a distinctive level of religious participation, conversion here refers to "a comprehensive personal change of religious

15 Walter Conn, *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender* (New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986), 27.

16 Bernard and Lonergan, *Method*, 241.

17 Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), esp. 7–12.

18 Ibid., 5.

19 Ibid., 12–14.

20 Ibid., 17.

21 Henri Gooren, *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

22 Ibid., 48–49.

worldview and identity, based on both self-report and attribution by others."[23] Such conversion can lay the ground for confession, or it can recede back to a more passive state of affiliation – and, depending on a range of factors, disaffiliation remains an open possibility, from any other level.[24] In order to understand the complex dynamics at play in each kind of transition, Gooren argues that one must attend to the widest possible variety of "individual life histories," which he attempts with reference to a rich sample of Catholic, Pentecostal, Mormon, Muslim, and other converts and deconverts, drawn from Europe, the United States, and Latin America.[25]

Lewis Rambo and Henri Gooren share with Bernard Lonergan a keen interest to distinguish conversion in its proper sense from mere affiliation with a religious tradition, whether this tradition be new to the potential convert or one in which she was raised or previously affiliated. Gooren makes this point in particularly strong terms:

> researchers should be wary of simply equating recruitment with conversion. For researchers who wish to understand both the process and effects of conversion all over the world, the distinction between affiliation and conversion is critical. To a large degree, this distinction gives us greater insights into the high religious mobility of many individuals.[26]

In addition to this point of commonality, all three theorists – one a Christian theologian and the other two social scientists – construct conversion as a process that occurs over time, rather than a once-and-for-all event. For Lonergan and Gooren, moreover, albeit for strikingly different reasons, the trajectory of conversion is fundamentally vertical, rather than horizontal.

Narratives of conversion in missionary Advaita

The theoretical proposals surveyed in the previous section aspire to offer cross-cultural, explanatory accounts of religious conversion. Nevertheless, all presume a normative Christian bias, in their interpretive perspectives, in their data sets, or both.[27] Other scholars have endeavoured to broaden the range of the enquiry by means of historical case studies across various religious traditions,

23 Ibid., 3.
24 Ibid., 49–52, 136–38.
25 Ibid., 16, 69–129.
26 Ibid., 141.
27 Gooren notes that one of the weaknesses of conversion theory to date is its nearly exclusive focus on conversions to Christianity, New Religious Movements and, to a lesser extent, Islam. See ibid., 40–42, as well as Henri Gooren, "Anthropology of Religious Conversion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, eds. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 84–116.

including in South Asia.[28] In this section, along similar lines, I offer a sampling of conversion narratives in Advaita Vedānta, including South Asian and Western converts in the Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda in 1897, and the Chinmaya Mission, founded by Swami Chinmayananda in 1951, as well as a more diffuse set of movements associated with the celebrated sage, Ramana Maharshi (1879–1950) and the Transcendental Meditation movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918–2008).[29] Given the limitations of space, these witnesses are more suggestive than conclusive.[30] Taken together, however, I believe they can be read both to verify Rambo and Gooren's insistence on the sheer variety of possible trajectories of religious conversion in any tradition and to provide hints of those broad, shared patterns that may be distinctive to Advaita Vedānta.[31]

One fruitful place to begin is the spiritual journey of Swami Dayananda Saraswati, discussed briefly in the introduction. As recorded by one of his devotees, Swami Dayananda's biography traces its hero's ever greater penetration into Advaita Vedānta as the heart of Hindu tradition.[32] Natarajan Iyer's early life in Tamil Nadu was characterised by his activism against the anti-religious Dravidian movement and eventual career in journalism. In 1952, he encountered what he described as a "*Sannyāsī* with fire and inspiration" – that is, Swami Chinmayananda. "Thereafter," writes the biographer, "Natarajan's life took a totally different turn. He joined the *Veda-Paṭhasālā* to learn chanting of the *Vedaḥs* . . . He was no longer interested in the job with the *Indian Express*. He waited only

28 For example, Heredia, *Changing Gods*; Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998); Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke, eds., *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003); Peter Berger and Sarbeswar Sahoo, eds., *Godroads: Modalities of Conversion in India* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

29 A fuller discussion of these four movements can be found in Reid B. Locklin, "A Century of Advaita Mission: Tracing a Lineage and Opening a Conversation," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 52, no. 4 (2017): 488–526. Though the Transcendental Meditation movement of Maharishi Mahesh Yogi can be interpreted in various ways, Cynthia Humes has persuasively argued that the Maharishi's religious vision was fundamentally rooted in Advaita Vedānta. See especially her essay "Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: Beyond the TM Technique," in *Gurus in America*, eds. Thomas Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005), 55–80.

30 Carl Jackson, building on Wendell Thomas, offers a more systematic survey of Western converts to Vedānta Societies in the United States and attempts to generalise some common shared features of converts, such as upper middle-class identity, Protestant background, self-identification as "spiritual seekers," female gender and often foreign birth. See Jackson, *Vedanta for the West*, 88–99; Wendell Thomas, *Hinduism Invades America* (New York: Beacon Press, 1930), 116–19.

31 The discussions in this and the following section represent revised and more fully developed versions of material originally presented in Reid B. Locklin, "Up, Over, Through: Reconsidering "Conversion" as a Category of Hindu-Christian Studies," *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, May 2012, https://voices.uchicago.edu/religionculture/ 2012/05/29/up-over-through-rethinking-conversion-as-a-category-of-hindu-christian-studies/.

32 Padma Narasimhan, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati: Traditional Teacher of Brahma Vidyā* (Madras: TT. Maps and Publications, n.d.).

for Chinmayananda to come back."[33] Natarajan quickly moved up the ranks of the Chinmaya Mission, first as a typist, then as a brahmacārin and editor of the fortnightly publication *Tyagi*, and finally, upon his initiation into renunciant life in 1962, as the charismatic teacher Swami Dayananda Saraswati. In the terms provided by Henri Gooren, Dayananda moved from *affiliation* to full *confession* in the Mission in a single decade.

Paradoxically, just as this process came to completion, Dayananda also entered a period of intense personal conflict and doubt, resulting in what might be termed a second conversion. An intense study of comparative mysticism and a chance encounter with one Swami Pranavananda in the 1960s led Dayananda to dismiss Chinmayananda's teaching in favour of what he regarded as a more traditional emphasis upon the word of the *Upaniṣads*, the *śabda-pramāṇaṃ* or verbal means of liberating self-knowledge.[34] "No more is *Vedāntaḥ* a theory," Dayanananda wrote of his personal revelation. "No more a philosophy . . . Afterwards, I had to go through the whole *Vedāntaḥ* again. I now had the key."[35] This he eventually did under the tutelage of another Advaitin teacher in Rishikesh, and the wisdom he acquired there led him entirely out of the Chinmaya movement.

Swami Dayananda's narrative might best be characterised as a conversion not to Hinduism or even to the Chinmaya Mission, but to the *Upaniṣads* and to what he came to identify as the "traditional teaching" of Advaita Vedānta.[36] It is a fairly straightforward narrative of religious intensification and intra-religious institutional movement. At quite the other end of the spectrum, at least at first sight, lie narratives of converts who take up the study and practice of Advaita Vedānta from more distant starting points in Christianity or another tradition, mostly though not exclusively from the West. Paul Brunton (1898–1981), Arthur Osborne (1906–1970) and the contemporary teacher Eckhart Tolle (1948–) were all Western followers of Ramana Maharshi, for example, and each in his own way took the initiative to spread the message of Advaita to a wider international public.[37] Philip Goldberg relates the story of Pravrajika Vrajaprana, who grew up "quasi-Protestant," read widely in world religions as a child and encountered the Ramakrishna Mission teacher Swami Prabhavananda as an antiwar activist

33 Ibid., 41–42.

34 For further discussion of this aspect of Dayananda's mature theology, see especially Anantanand Rambachan, "'The Eyes Must Be Opened to Find Out If They See': Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Universalisation of the Veda as a Pramāṇa," *Journal of Hindu Studies* 7 (2014): 25–53.

35 Narasimhan, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati,* 61.

36 See especially his short, mildly polemical pamphlet *The Teaching Tradition of Advaita Vedanta* (Saylorsburg, PA: Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, 1993). This pamphlet is reprinted as a fitting conclusion to Dayananda's biography in Narasimhan, *Swami Dayananda Saraswati*, 213–30.

37 See Paul Brunton, *The Maharshi and His Message* (Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 2009); Arthur Osborne, *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge: A Biography*, 4th ed. (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2006); and the discussion in Phillip Charles Lucas, "Neo-Advaita in America: Three Representative Teachers," in *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism*, eds. Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 163–88.

in 1967.[38] For some ten years, Vrajaprana remained informally affiliated with the Mission through the local Vedanta Society. After a near-fatal car accident, she experienced a renewed sense of commitment, joined the Sarada Convent in Southern California, and eventually took her final vows of *saṃnyāsa* in 1988. Of this transformation, Vrajaprana writes:

> There was no defining moment when I became "Hindu". . . . My own conversion was gradual enough to be nearly imperceptible. A few ideas planted by my parents were given impetus with my Vedanta Society encounter and then slowly gestated within me. Externally, I led a prosaic life – college, graduate school, career – but it was ultimately unsatisfying. The fulfillment I hoped to find in career and relationships was not the fulfillment I craved.[39]

This fulfillment Vrajaprana would find only in the Ramakrishna monastic order and the liberating self-knowledge of Advaita, and she has emerged as one of the most prominent teachers of Vedānta in contemporary North America.

In the first chapter of his monograph *A Vision for Hinduism*, the Hindu theologian Jeffery D. Long offers a similar, fuller account of his own journey to the Ramakrishna Mission.[40] Long self-consciously identifies as a "*religious* Hindu" who grew up "the only child of middle class, Roman Catholic parents" in small-town Missouri.[41] Long lost his father at a young age, and this provoked a "dark night of the soul" that would eventually unfold into his "formal affiliation to Hinduism, and eventually to the Ramakrishna tradition."[42] Whereas Vrajaprana encountered Hindu tradition through the Ramakrishna Mission, Long first became Hindu and only subsequently, as a ritualised Hindu, found his way to missionary Advaita. Interestingly, he is at some pains to express his gratitude for his original formation in Catholic Christianity, insisting that he is "not the stereotypical, angry ex-Catholic." "As a characterization of this process, I think it would be more correct to say that my originally Catholic worldview gradually *expanded*, rather than that I *switched* worldviews at some discernible point in time."[43] In the framework of Bernard Lonergan, described in the previous section, Long's transformation would seem to involve a process of sublation and a broadening of his religious horizon, rather than any form of radical break.

38 Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation – How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Harmony Books, 2010), 83–84. I have also made reference to Pravrajika Vrajaprana's own account in "The Convert-Stranger in Our Midst," in *The Stranger's Religion: Fascination and Fear*, ed. Anna Länström (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 169–85, esp. 170–71.

39 Vrajaprana, "The Convert," 171.

40 Jeffery D. Long, *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

41 Ibid., 5.

42 Ibid., 6.

43 Ibid. 8.

The stories of Pravrajika Vrajaprana and Jeffery D. Long represent instances of what Rambo calls "tradition transition" – that is, conversion to a new religious tradition, ostensibly different from the tradition(s) of one's upbringing. A somewhat different range of narrative possibilities emerges in the accounts of Western practitioners of Transcendental Meditation, surveyed by Lola Williamson in her ethnographic study, *Transcendent in America*.[44] Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who founded TM in the 1950s, consistently presented his Advaita teaching as a contemplative technique compatible with any religion. Nevertheless, several disciples Williamson interviewed describe their entry into TM as a momentous, once-and-for-all moment of personal transformation, in which they laid aside their old selves and stepped into a new religious world.[45]

This does not, however, exhaust the possible trajectories in and through the TM movement. Williamson observes that, while some members of these movements do leave Christian or Jewish roots behind, others find ways to reintegrate these roots into their new worldview. One Catholic TM practitioner, for example, finds new meaning in receiving Eucharistic communion from the teachings of the Maharishi.[46] In another, remarkable example, a TM practitioner named Donna actually converts to Catholicism, due in part to her conviction that Catholic teachings on Mary reflect "all this Mother Divine stuff on the Hindu level."[47] In neither case, do these arguments for continued practice or even conversion to Catholicism reflect mainstream Christian beliefs. It seems clear that the teaching of TM has come to govern these practitioners' relation to Christianity, particularly when distinctively Christian teachings and religious practices are reduced to the status of mere "different forms" in the cosmic "illusion" of relative existence.[48] In their accounts, the non-dual message of Advaita Vedānta both preserves and ultimately subsumes the particularities of their Christian faith.

So far, we have encountered narratives of conversion to missionary Advaita in its institutional forms, from both within and without the Hindu tradition, as well as some examples in which assimilation of the Advaita teaching is combined with institutional affiliation in one or another Christian tradition. But, as Gooren insists, the full range of conversion trajectories must also include accounts of *disaffiliation*.[49] Thus, for example, the Anglican theologian Sarah Coakley narrates a deeply transformative encounter with TM in her mid-twenties, along with her self-conscious decision to deepen the insights she gained by turning away from TM or any form of Vedānta in favour of a renewed exploration of Christian

44 Lola Williamson, *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010).

45 Ibid., 146.

46 Ibid., 192.

47 Ibid., 205.

48 See the discussion in Ibid., 193, 205–6.

49 Gooren, *Religious Conversion*, 48–50, 102–10.

mysticism.[50] And Robert C. Forman, in an autobiographical memoir, describes his practice of TM as a young person, a profound experience of non-dual realisation in 1972, and his eventual separation from the movement.[51] He wholeheartedly credits Maharishi Mahesh Yogi for showing him the way, but the very content of his experience ultimately makes him a stranger to institutional TM.

Though their institutional trajectories could hardly be more different, Forman and Coakley both describe encounters with TM that propel them deeper into their own contemplative experience, beyond the explicit teachings of TM. The late nineteenth-century activist Margaret Noble (1867–1911), also known as Sister Nivedita, followed a similar, paradoxical path into and then out of the Ramakrishna Mission in pursuit of Indian nationalism, all the while remaining faithful, in her self-understanding, to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda.[52] In each of these three cases, the path to disaffiliation follows a course set by the Advaita teaching, as its full impact transcends the limits of all institutional names and forms, including those of TM, the Ramakrishna Mission or any other fixed tradition of Vedānta.

A final, still more paradoxical case of conversion to Advaita can be found in the Hindu-Christian renunciant, Swami Abhishiktananda (1910–1973).[53] A French Benedictine, Henri Le Saux, was summoned to India by his confrere Jules Monchanin in 1948 to attempt an experiment in monastic inculturation. Le Saux took this experiment further than anyone expected. Between 1949 and 1955, he made a number of journeys to Arunachala and met Ramana Maharshi several times before the sage's death in 1950. After this, he placed himself in the care of another guru and began to have profound mystical experiences. Abhishiktananda continued to celebrate the Eucharist as a Catholic priest, and he characterised the relationship between the historic Christ and his experience of *advaita* as a holy struggle, without any clear solution in the world of name and form.[54] Towards the end of his life, however, he began to articulate a newfound sense of peace in the midst of the struggle. "Here," he writes,

> in solitude without and within, the solitude of the Only, in the transcendence of all uttering and all thinking, you understand *eimi*, "I am" – the name under which Yahweh revealed himself. Then Easter becomes this awakening to nothing new, but to what is – to that reality that has neither origin nor end.[55]

50 Sarah Coakley, "Prayer as Crucible: How My Mind Has Changed," *The Christian Century*, 22 March 2011, 32–40.

51 Robert C. Forman, *Enlightenment Ain't What It's Cracked Up to Be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul* (Winchester, UK and Washington, DC: O-Books, 2010).

52 See Heredia, *Changing Gods*, 207–22.

53 My brief exposition here follows the account and analysis in Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions,* trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 67–90.

54 Ibid., 74–86.

55 Ibid., 86.

Easter here is figured as that dawning, experiential knowledge of God and self, deeper than Christianity, deeper than Advaita, deeper than both together. Swami Abhishiktananda remains steadfastly Christian, but his Christianity is purified and transformed by missionary Advaita. He never converts to Vedānta, but his Christianity is profoundly Vedāntic*ised*.

Non-dual conversion

The narratives surveyed in the previous section are, at one level, entirely recognisable. One can easily imagine converts to Christianity or other traditions who exceed the traditionalism of those who converted them, like Swami Dayananda; who enter the tradition through an extended process of ever-greater religious intensity and fulfillment, like Long or Vrajaprana; who have complex, hybrid religious identities like Swami Abhishiktananda and the various practitioners of TM; who affiliate with the tradition only briefly, to return to traditions of origin with a renewed appreciation, like Coakley; or who, like Forman or Nivedita, are eventually led by the experience of their adopted tradition beyond that tradition's own formal boundaries. Indeed, I have noted various ways in which the theoretical frameworks of Lewis Rambo and Henri Gooren help to elucidate these converts' accounts of their journeys in and through Advaita Vedānta.

But these frameworks do not necessarily capture the properly theological significance of these conversions, in their own religious contexts.[56] In their 2014 *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, Rambo and Charles Farhadian attempt to move the conversation one step further, with chapters on diverse, normative visions of religious transformation beyond the Christian fold, including traditions of Asia. In their chapters on Islam, for example, both Marcia Hermansen and Karin Van Nieuwkerk draw attention to distinctively Muslim themes of return, "reversion" or perfection of an original, innate faith.[57] Andrea Jain describes conversion to Jainism in terms of gradual re-attunement and construction of a new religious identity that may coexist with other such identities.[58] Finally, and importantly for my purposes here, Arvind Sharma alludes briefly to T.M.P. Mahadevan's (1911–1983) account of conversion in Hindu thought as "*vertical* . . . moving 'from the lower to the higher conception of God' and/or

56 The discussion in this and the following section overlaps at several points with the argument in Reid B. Locklin, "Non-Dual Belonging: Conversion, Sanskritization and Dissolution of the Multiple in Advaita Missionary Movements," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 28 (2015), esp. 91, 94–96. I am grateful to the Editor of the *JHCS* for permission to reproduce sections of that article here.

57 See Marcia Hermansen, "Conversion to Islam in Theological and Historical Perspectives," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, eds. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 633–34; and Karin van Nieuwkerk, "'Conversion' to Islam and the Construction of a Pious Self," in ibid., 668–69.

58 Andrea R. Jain, "Conversion to Jain Identity," in ibid., 444–45.

moving from a lower to a higher level of moral behavior" rather than from one religious tradition to another.[59]

In his chapter of the *Handbook*, and elsewhere in his writings, Sharma speaks of such vertical conversion as a feature of Hinduism in general. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Mahadevan and Sharma himself are both closely associated with the study of Advaita Vedānta.[60] Hence, there are at least *prima facie* grounds to ask whether this might reflect a distinctively – even if not exclusively – Advaitin point of view. Consider, for example, the ubiquitous mantra from *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.3.28, recited often during religious services in the Ramakrishna Mission:

> *asato mā sadgamaya//tamaso mā jyotirgamaya//mṛtyormā amṛtam gamaya*
> Lead [us] from the unreal to the real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.

Striking in this mantra is the asymmetry between unreal and real, darkness and light, death and immortality, as well as the concrete possibility of graded progress upwards from the lower to the higher categories. Such a schema is quite prominent in the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. "To the Hindu," he insisted at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religion, "man [*sic*] is not travelling from error to truth, but from truth to truth, from lower to higher truth."[61] He did not hesitate to assign definite grades to different stages of development, with Dvaita or theist religious teachings at the lowest level on the ladder, Viśiṣṭādvaita or panentheist teachings in the middle, and Advaita as the final stage and perfect fulfillment.[62] Elsewhere, Vivekananda goes further, questioning whether Vedānta should really be regarded as "religion" at all.[63] It is instead the highest reality behind all individual religious claims, a saving knowledge of the way things actually are, now and eternally. In light of this higher truth, other religions – including theistic and panentheist traditions of Hinduism – can be dismissed as mere "kindergartens of religion" at best, and "foolish beliefs and superstitions" at worst.[64]

59 Arvind Sharma, "Hinduism and Conversion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, eds. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 440, citing T.M.P. Mahadevan, *Outlines of Hinduism* (Bombay: Chetana, 1971), 20.

60 This is also true of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975), whom Sharma credits as the original source of this insight. See Sharma, *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*, 151n85.

61 Swami Vivekananda, "Addresses at the Parliament of Religions," in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol. I (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama: 1970), 17.

62 Swami Vivekananda, *What Religion Is: In the Words of Vivekananda*, ed. Swami Vidyatmananda (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972), 105–16. See also Bradley J. Malkovsky, "Swami Vivekananda and Bede Griffiths on Religious Pluralism: Hindu and Christian Approaches to Truth," *Horizons* 25, no. 2 (1998): 220–27.

63 Swami Vivekananda, "Is Vedanta the Future Religion?" in *Complete Works*, vol. VIII (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), 122–41, esp. 122–25.

64 Ibid., 138–41.

Given this contrast between higher and lower in matters of religion, and the real possibility of ascent, it perhaps makes sense that one also finds language that resonates strongly with the Hebrew *shub*, a turning away from one way of life to embrace another. In his comment on the Advaita classic *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, for instance, Swami Chinmayananda glosses the repeated phrase *anuvartanaṃ tyaktvā* – "having renounced one's following" of the world (*loka*), the body (*deha*) and the scriptures (*śāstra*) – as a call for radical reorientation. "Without changing the old values of life and old ways of life," he writes, "a new dimension of life and living cannot be achieved. . . . If you want to take up sincere *sādhanā*, you will have to redirect your life's flow."[65] In the immediate context of the commentary, it seems clear that Chinmayananda is referring here to what Rambo refers to as *intensification* and Rudolf Heredia as *ātmaparivartan* – that is, a transformation of religious commitment within the tradition. Nevertheless, the sharp contrast between old and new ways of life, between paths of sensuality and spirituality, is striking, and the primary summons is to redirect one's spiritual striving towards a "new dimension of life and living," regardless of one's starting point in one or another historical tradition.

Such a broader vision of religious transformation can also be found elsewhere in Chinmayananda's teachings. In his important work *A Manual of Self-Unfoldment*, for example, he offers an account of Hinduism's historical diffusion throughout Asia, noting that the "people of the foreign countries welcomed and hailed the superior culture of the Hindus. . . . This great religion of the Hindus is a Mighty force for universal good."[66] Chinmayananda clarifies the meaning of Hindu "religion" a few pages further along: it is, on Chinmayananda's reading, none other than the teaching of non-duality, as propounded by the Hindu *Upaniṣads* and epics, the Christian Bible and every authentic scripture of any tradition.[67] Because of its universality, its glory, and its self-evident superiority, this highest religious vision need not be "thrust" on other people by force or deceit.[68] If, as implied in Swami Chinmayananda's reading of *tyaktvā* in the *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, the new dimension of life opened by Advaita requires a renunciation and redirection, this offer of transformation comes to potential hearers not as a competitor to their home traditions, but as these traditions' own true essence and final perfection.

This idea is clarified further later in the same volume in a description of the small Study Groups that would become one of the signature features of the Chinmaya Mission. A question is raised: "Study Group. Is it a subtle means of conversion to the Hindu faith?" To this, the authors give the following response:

> Not at all. Vedanta is not sectarian in appeal. As experienced by a number of members of study groups all over the world, this study makes one a better

65 Swami Chinmayananda, *Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Rev. ed. (Mumbai: Chinmaya Prakashan, 2013), 289–90.

66 Swami Chinmayananda, *A Manual of Self-Unfoldment* (Mumbai: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1975, 2000), 159.

67 Ibid., 159–66.

68 Ibid., 159.

> individual irrespective of whatever faith he or she may belong to. Vedanta does not seek converts. It is a great catalyst for a better understanding and self-integration. Its appeal is to the intellect and its application is universal. Hence is it used for self-improvement and never for conversion.[69]

The language of "catalyst" and "self-improvement" is telling. As in Vivekananda's rhetorical exemption of Vedānta from the category of "religion," so also here the Advaita teaching is situated at a higher level relative to participants' individual faith positions, such that it can serve as a catalyst for their ever-greater personal integration. Potential disciples need not fear that they will be asked to become Hindu. Participation in study groups simply "makes one a better individual."

The point is not to "convert," if this is read to imply a switch from one religious tradition to a different one. It is to become reinterpreted, refined, reinscribed in the higher teaching of Advaita. Indeed, religious transformation in Advaita would seem to implicate many of its disciples in some form of dual or plural form of religious belonging, at least provisionally, as the various ideas, practices, and (mis) understandings they bring to the study of Advaita are brought into gradual conformity with the teaching. As propagated by such teachers as Vivekananda and Chinmayananda, Vedānta might be said to liberate disciples *within* the traditions that they currently inhabit rather than *out of* them, even while calling all such bonds of identity radically into question.

Non-dual belonging

In her introduction to the edited collection on dual religious belonging, *Many Mansions?*, Catherine Cornille notes that, although not all religious traditions require exclusive allegiance across the whole of life, most require "single-minded commitment" in those areas that lie within "their own area of religious expertise."[70] Where a tradition does require a more encompassing commitment – as would be the case for most forms of Christianity – she suggests three ways of harmonising such commitment with some form of belonging in another tradition: belief in a shared, "ultimate religious experience" at the foundation of both traditions; absorbing the "hermeneutical framework" of the second tradition into the superior "symbolic framework" of the home tradition; or an acceptance of the mutual "complementarity" of the two traditions.[71]

The teaching of Advaita undoubtedly requires "single-minded commitment." Beyond this, its distinctive theology of conversion would seem to reflect all three of Cornille's hermeneutical options, without being strictly identical with any one

69 Ibid., 188.

70 Catherine Cornille, "Introduction: The Dynamics of Multiple Belonging," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 2.

71 Ibid., 5–6.

of them. In the Chinmaya Mission, for example, disciples do sometimes identify with multiple traditions, and teachings from other traditions are frequently deployed by Chinmaya Mission teachers in the propagation of Advaita. To offer just one example: in the summer of 2007, a visiting *ācārya* from the Mission concluded a five-day *yajña* or series of discourses on the Bhagavad Gītā in the Greater Toronto Area with a day-long retreat entitled, "The Wisdom of the Sages."[72] The form of the lecture was PowerPoint presentation of short maxims drawn from great saints and mystics from many different religious traditions. The otherness of these traditions was never fully acknowledged; nor was it categorically denied. It was, instead, dissolved in the process of instruction, as each successive wisdom tradition added further dimensions to the higher truth of Advaita Vedānta. Religious belonging, to the degree that it figured at all in the presentation, was portrayed as neither singular nor multiple, but self-consciously non-dual.

It is important to recall that Advaita Vedānta is neither the sole nor even the most widespread expression of missionary Hinduism,[73] and its claim to embody the "essence" of Hinduism represents a projection of its own missiological self-understanding, rather than a fact of history. Ankur Barua has referred to this rhetorical strategy, as articulated by Swami Vivekananda and other modern Vedāntins, as "hierarchical encompassment," a tolerance of religious diversity conditioned on the subsumption of religious others within a paternalist Advaita frame.[74] This is accurate as far as it goes, but it may not fully capture the coherence this theological perspective offers to the life experience of a Swami Dayananda, a Pravrajika Vrajaprana, or even a Swami Abhishiktananda. In these narratives of conversion, we encounter Advaita as a living force, which sometimes provides stability in the midst of chaos and at other times challenges old certainties and disrupts the status quo. What is shared is a "single-minded commitment" to self-knowledge as a moral ideal and liberative goal. The process of pursuing this goal is necessarily various, and it entails negotiation of various forms of social and religious self-identification along the way.

One of the common tropes deployed by Advaita teachers to illustrate the relationship between the ever-pure, changeless *ātman* and the phenomenal world is the magnet, which causes other objects to move in its unmoving, agentless presence. Potential converts need not be persuaded to seek liberation. They are drawn upwards by the unmoving, intrinsic power of the teaching, and the question of their affiliation with one or another historical tradition is rendered strictly secondary – even, perhaps, illusory. As a social and religious phenomenon, belonging belongs firmly in the realm of name and form. It is already and always in the process of sublation by the truth of Advaita.

72 Swami Ishwarananda, *Wisdom of the Sages* (Richmond Hill, ON, Canada: Chinmaya Mission, 25 August 2007).

73 This is particularly evident in the broader surveys provided by Hummel, *Indische Mission*; Klostermaier, "In Every Town"; Sardella, "Hinduism."

74 Ankur Barua, *Debating "Conversion" in Hinduism and Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2015), 74–75, 121–25.

References

Barua, Ankur. *Debating 'Conversion' in Hinduism and Christianity*. London: Routledge, 2015.

Berger, Peter, and Sarbeswar Sahoo, eds. *Godroads: Modalities of Conversion in India*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

Brunton, Paul. *The Maharshi and His Message*. Tiruvannamalai, India: Sri Ramanasramam, 2009.

Chinmayananda, Swami. *A Manual of Self-Unfoldment*. Mumbai: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust, 1975/2020.

———. *Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's Vivekacūḍāmaṇi*, Rev. ed. Mumbai: Chinmaya Prakashan, 2013.

Coakley, Sarah. "Prayer as Crucible: How My Mind Has Changed." *The Christian Century* 22 (March 2011): 32–40.

Conn, Walter. *Christian Conversion: A Developmental Interpretation of Autonomy and Surrender*. New York and Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986.

Cornille, Catherine, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Dayananda Saraswati, Swami. *The Teaching Tradition of Advaita Vedanta*. Saylorsburg, PA: Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, 1993.

———. "An Open Letter to Pope John Paul II: Conversion Is Violence." *Indian Express*, October 29, 1999. https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/conversion-is-violence/.

Dupuis, Jacques S.J. *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*. Translated by Robert R. Barr. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991.

Flinn, Frank K. "Conversion: Up from Evangelicalism or the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience." In *Religious Conversion: Contemporary Practices and Controversies*, edited by Christopher Lamb and M. Darroll Bryant, 51–74. London and New York: Cassell, 1999.

Forman, Robert C. *Enlightenment Ain't What It's Cracked Up to Be: A Journey of Discovery, Snow and Jazz in the Soul*. Winchester, UK and Washington, DC: O-Books, 2010.

Goldberg, Philip. *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation – How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*. New York: Harmony Books, 2010.

Gooren, Henri. *Religious Conversion and Disaffiliation: Tracing Patterns of Change in Faith Practices*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Heredia, Rudolf C. *Changing Gods: Rethinking Conversion in India*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.

Humes, Cynthia Ann. "Maharishi Mahesh Yogi: Beyond the TM Technique." In *Gurus in America*, edited by Thomas Forsthoefel and Cynthia Ann Humes, 55–80. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.

Hummel, Reinhart. *Indische Mission und neue Frömmigkeit in Westen: Religiöse Bewegungen Indiens in westlichen Kulturen*. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer, 1980.

Ishwarananda, Swami. *Wisdom of the Sages*. Richmond Hill, ON, Canada: Chinmaya Mission, August 25, 2007.

Jackson, Carl S. *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994.

Kim, Sebastian C.H. *In Search of Identity: Debates on Religious Conversion in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Klostermaier, Klaus K. " 'In Every Town, Country and Village My Name Will Be Sung': Hindu Missions in India and Abroad." In *Mixed Messages: Materiality, Textuality,*

Missions, edited by Jamie S. Scott and Gareth Griffiths, 173–202. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Locklin, Reid B. "Up, Over, Through: Reconsidering 'Conversion' as a Category of Hindu-Christian Studies." *Religion and Culture Web Forum*, May 2012. https://voices.uchicago.edu/religionculture/2012/05/29/up-over-through-rethinking-conversion-as-a-category-of-hindu-christian-studies/

———. "Non-Dual Belonging: Conversion, Sanskritization and Dissolution of the Multiple in Advaita Missionary Movements." *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 28 (2015): 88–99.

———. "A Century of Advaita Mission: Tracing a Lineage and Opening a Conversation." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 52, no. 4 (2017): 488–526.

Lonergan, S.J., and Bernard, J.F.*Method in Theology,* 2nd ed. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972.

Long, Jeffrey D. *A Vision for Hinduism: Beyond Hindu Nationalism*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

Lucas, Phillip Charles. "Neo-Advaita in America: Three Representative Teachers." In *Homegrown Gurus: From Hinduism in America to American Hinduism*, edited by Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson, 163–88. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2013.

Mahadevan, T.M.P. *Outlines of Hinduism*. Bombay: Chetana, 1971.

Malkovsky, Bradley J. "Swami Vivekananda and Bede Griffiths on Religious Pluralism: Hindu and Christian Approaches to Truth." *Horizons* 25, no. 2 (1998): 217–37.

Narasimhan, Padma. *Swami Dayananda Saraswati: Traditional Teacher of Brahma Vidyā*. Madras: TT. Maps and Publications, n.d.

Osborne, Arthur. *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge: A Biography*, 4th ed. San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2006.

Rambachan, Anantanand. "'The Eyes Must Be Opened to Find Out If They See': Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Universalisation of the Veda as a Pramāṇa." *Journal of Hindu Studies* 7 (2014): 25–53.

Rambo, Lewis R. *Understanding Religious Conversion*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993.

Rambo, Lewis R., and Charles E. Farhadian, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Robinson, Rowena, and Sathianathan Clarke, eds. *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Sardella, Ferdinando. "Hinduism." In *World Religions and Their Missions*, edited by Aaron J. Ghiloni, 153–81. New York: Peter Lang, 2015.

Sharma, Arvind. *Hinduism as a Missionary Religion*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2011.

Thomas, Wendell. *Hinduism Invades America*. New York: Beacon Press, 1930.

Viswanathan, Gauri. *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Vivekananda, Swami. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1970.

———. *What Religion is: In the Words of Vivekananda*. Edited by Swami Vidyatmananda. Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1972.

Vrajaprana, Pravrajika. "The Convert – Stranger in Our Midst." In *The Stranger's Religion: Fascination and Fear*, edited by Anna Länström, 169–85. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004.

Williamson, Lola. *Transcendent in America: Hindu-Inspired Meditation Movements as New Religion*. New York and London: New York University Press, 2010.

Wilson, Stephen R. "Becoming a Yogi: Resocialization and Deconditioning as Conversion Process." *Sociological Analysis* 45, no. 4 (1984): 301–14.

9 Hindu, Christian, Hindu-Christian, and beyond

Exploring the relations between identity and spirituality

Jeffery D. Long

"In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals."[1]

– Mohandas K. Gandhi –

Introduction: within and without

This essay reflects upon the relations between one's professed religious identity and one's inner life as a believing, practising person pursuing a spiritual path. Its basic thesis is that, whether one's professed identity is singular, dual, or multiple, one's basic worldview, along with the values and practices it entails, is singular. Participation in multiple traditions is not necessarily evidence that one holds many worldviews at the same time; which is arguably a logical impossibility (though that strong claim is not being advanced here). It could be evidence that one's worldview simply overlaps and is able to draw upon multiple traditional sources. A "Hindu Christian," then, to take just one possible example, is not "part Hindu" and "part Christian." A Hindu Christian is, rather, a singular entity – a whole person – whose worldview and practice integrate elements of Hinduism and elements of Christianity (and, no doubt, some elements held in common by both traditions). Such a designation can become problematic when communities understand themselves as mutually exclusive with others or when state bureaucracies operate with such a mutually exclusive view (requiring one to fill out one religious designation or another on a government form, for example).

A basic assumption of this essay is that one's professed identity and one's inward orientation to ultimate reality, while certainly informing one another deeply, can also be in tension with one another in ways that can lead to deep shifts in both. One may posit a spectrum, in other words, at one end of which would be a person whose outward religious identity and inward orientation and worldview are in such harmony as to be virtually indistinguishable. To know that this person is, say, a Roman Catholic, may tell us pretty much all we need to know about

1 Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Hindu Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Rajghat, Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 2020), 43.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-9

her worldview and way of life (though the likelihood of ever actually meeting a "pure" Roman Catholic of this kind is exceedingly small, given the difficulty of even agreeing upon a standard to measure or determine such "purity"). At the other end of this spectrum would be a person whose outward religious identification and inward disposition to reality are in profound tension with one another, so much so that it is likely that this person will soon take up a different religious identity altogether.[2] This person is in the throes of what Alasdair MacIntyre calls an "epistemological crisis."[3]

This essay's assumption of a distinction between an "inner" or "interior" spiritual life and an "outer" or "exterior" religious identification should not be taken as a rejection of the decades of scholarship in the fields of religious studies, anthropology, sociology, and psychology which have detailed the "social construction of reality."[4] What we typically take to be our inner life is dependent upon and conditioned by our social, cultural, religious, and familial contexts in myriad ways; for we are ineluctably relational beings. The distinction between the "inner" and "outer" dimensions of the person should not be taken as a strong claim about the nature of personhood but as a heuristic device that is useful in elucidating the concept of dual religious belonging. Such a distinction enables us to point out that there is always, even in cases of singular religious belonging, a gap between the worldview of an actual person and the ideal typical worldview of a religious tradition, as defined either by authorities within that tradition or by scholarly discourse.

It is also a device that is not without some foundation in both Hindu and Christian thought. While one does occasionally find the assertion that a sense of self as involving an "inner" dimension and an "outer" dimension – with the inner self being the "real you" and the outward self having more of the character of a façade – is a peculiarly modern and Western approach to the idea of self, further investigation reveals that this is not entirely the case. Hindu traditions have long affirmed the reality of the *ādhyātmika*, or inward dimensions of existence, as distinct from the *laukika*, worldly realm of *dharma*, or social duty. Japanese culture makes a similar distinction between *giri* ("duty" or "obligation") and *ninjō* ("human feeling") on the basis of a view of the self as being capable of experiencing conflicts between its outward social responsibilities and its inward inclinations. Even the Ruist or "Confucian" tradition, which is sometimes read as dispensing with a strong distinction between the "inner" and "outer" in its quest for a close harmony between the two, contains the distinction between *li* ("ritual"

2 "Religious identity" is of course taken, throughout this essay, to include the possibility of self-identification as a non-religious person, as the examples that will be cited from Newman will make clear. "Religious identity" does not mean that one identifies as religious but simply refers to how one describes one's orientation towards religion.

3 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 361–69.

4 See Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

or "etiquette") and *ren* ("benevolence" or "humanity") – that is, the ideal outward behaviour of a person as codified in social norms and the ideal person's inward disposition.[5]

The importance of this distinction for dual or multiple religious belonging

Why is this distinction between inner and outer important? Drawing upon the work of John Henry Newman, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead, the thesis of this essay, again, is that, even if one's outward religious identity is dual or multiple, one's ultimate commitment is singular: to a specific view of and orientation towards reality that is one's own – one's inner view – even as it draws upon multiple traditions as one seeks to express and sustain it in practice. In this sense, this essay argues that the singularity of an individual's identity rests not only in the fact that it is singular, as in self-consistent, but also that it is singularly unique to them and them alone. In short, this essay is an argument for Gandhi's claim that, "In reality, there are as many religions as there are individuals."[6]

In addition to the figures already mentioned, this essay probably owes its greatest debt to the life and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Bengali sage who saw religious traditions not as fixed identities, to which one must adhere, so much as collections of ideas and practices aimed at the attainment of the state variously known as awakening, self-realisation, or God realisation: a state seen in some traditions as a complete absorption of one's consciousness in infinite being, consciousness, and bliss, in other traditions as loving communion with a Supreme Being, and by Sri Ramakrishna as a state conceivable in both of these ways, and more. For Sri Ramakrishna, it is not the label one attaches to one's practice, but the experience of the infinite reality to which this practice leads, which is paramount.

In this way, Ramakrishna is very much in accord with contemporary "spiritual but not religious" or SBNR movements, which regard a fixed religious affiliation as a limiting factor in spiritual life and a stumbling block on the way to a spirituality which aims to embrace the good in all paths and people.[7] Unlike some who define themselves in this way, however, this essay does not see religious identity as being wholly irrelevant to one's inner spiritual life. The "inner" and the "outer" worlds impinge upon one another in important ways that are worthy of reflection

5 Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998).

6 Cited from Glyn Richards, ed., *A Sourcebook of Modern Hinduism* (Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1985), 156.

7 And indeed, as Philip Goldberg and others have chronicled, this sensibility of Ramakrishna's – which is, in many ways typical of Hindu traditions – mediated to the West by Ramakrishna's pre-eminent disciple, Swami Vivekananda, is an important part of the genealogy of the SBNR movement. See Philip Goldberg, *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation – How Indian Spirituality Changed the West* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010).

and consideration (which is of course why even the distinction between "inner" and "outer" is not to be taken as absolute).

Autobiographical background

In my case, there was an initial religious identity as a Roman Catholic Christian: an identity which was an effect of my birth in a certain family, community, and historical era. There then followed a shift to a dual religious identity as I realised that a Vedāntic Hindu worldview and practice deeply complemented my lived spirituality and thought process as a Roman Catholic. This eventually led to a further shift wholly to a Hindu identity, as I found the tensions and contradictions between my orientation and that of the Christian community unsustainable, due to constant questioning of my views by others, and their insistence that I could not believe what I did and still be a Christian. I found these tensions greater, even, than the tensions involved in identifying with a tradition that is widely understood as belonging to a national and ethnic community different from my own, given that Hindus are overwhelmingly Indian.[8]

I nonetheless remain aware that my Roman Catholic religious point of origin continues to inform the ways in which I conceptualise and practise a Hindu tradition (specifically, the contemporary Vedānta tradition of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda). Indeed, my background gives rise both to creative opportunities and to tensions and challenges of its own, as I seek to express myself theologically[9] in ways that are authentic both to my own experience and to the self-understanding of the community of which I am now a member, and for which I am increasingly called upon to speak publicly. While not a "dual belonger," the extent to which my Catholic background informs my Hindu worldview and practice does characterise this worldview and practise in distinctive ways that bring back to mind Gandhi's claim about there being, in reality, as many religions as there are individuals.

While we each have a singular identity, it is also true that we each have, in another sense, multiple affiliations, inasmuch as even singular traditions also draw on many sources. As Thich Nhat Hanh has famously said, "Just as a flower is made only of non-flower elements, Buddhism is made only of non-Buddhist elements, including Christian ones, and Christianity is made of non-Christian elements, including Buddhist ones."[10] The coalescence of many religious identities into one can be seen as an example of Alfred North Whitehead's principle that, "The many become one, and are increased by one."[11] What ultimately matters, the author argues, on the basis of Vedānta, is not how one identifies religiously, or

8 Roughly 93.2% of Hindus globally live in India. See my *Hinduism in America: A Convergence of Worlds* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 7.

9 Even my use of the term *theology* can be seen as an effect of my Catholic upbringing and education.

10 Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Penguin Books, 1995), 11.

11 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* (Corrected Edition) (New York: Macmillan, 1978), 21.

whether this identification is singular, dual, or multiple, but rather, the transformation effected in the practice of one's spiritual path, whatever label or labels may be placed upon it or upon the one who adheres to it.

A singular commitment: one's inner worldview and orientation towards ultimate reality

I would like to begin these reflections with a fairly lengthy quotation from John Henry Newman's *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, on the nature of religious conversion. Given my own journey with religious identity, I find Newman's account to be the truest to my experience of any account of conversion that I have yet read. The good cardinal writes:

> When . . . we are told that a man has changed from one religion to another, the first question which we have to ask, is, have the first and the second religions nothing in common? If they have common doctrines, he has changed only a portion of his creed, not the whole; and the next question is, has he abandoned those doctrines which are common to his new creed and his old? and then again, was he certain of the old, or is he certain of the new?
>
> Thus, of three Protestants, one becomes a Catholic, a second a Unitarian, and a third an unbeliever: how is this? The first becomes a Catholic, because he assented, as a Protestant, to the doctrine of our Lord's divinity, with a real assent and a genuine conviction, and because this certitude, taking possession of his mind, led him on to welcome the Catholic doctrines of the Real Presence and of the Theotocos, till his Protestantism fell off from him, and he submitted himself to the Church. The second became a Unitarian, because, proceeding on the principle that Scripture was the rule of faith and that a man's private judgement was its rule of interpretation, and finding that the doctrine of the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds did not follow by logical necessity from the text of Scripture, he said to himself, "The word of God has been made of none effect by the traditions of men," and therefore nothing was left for him but to profess what he considered primitive Christianity, and to become a Humanitarian.[12] The third gradually subsided into infidelity, because he started with the Protestant dogma that a priesthood was a corruption of the simplicity of the Gospel. First, then, he would protest against the sacrifice of the Mass; next he gave up baptismal regeneration, and the sacramental principle; then he asked himself whether dogmas were not a restraint on Christian liberty as well as sacraments; then came the question, what after all was the use of teachers of religion? why should any one stand between him and his Maker? After a time it struck him, that this obvious question had to be answered by the Apostles as well as by the Anglican clergy; so he

12 Newman here seems to be conflating "Unitarian" and "Humanitarian," which he sees as theologically coterminous.

> came to the conclusion that the true and only revelation of God to man is that which is written on the heart. This did for a time, and he remained a Deist. But then it occurred to him, that this inward moral law was there within the breast whether there was a God or not, and that it was a roundabout way of enforcing that law, to say that it came from God, and simply unnecessary, considering it carried with it its own sacred and sovereign authority, as our feelings instinctively testified; and when he turned to look at the physical world around him, he really did not see what scientific proof there was there of the Being of God at all, and it seemed to him as if all things would go on quite as well as at present, without that hypothesis as with it; so he dropped it, and became [an] . . . Atheist.
>
> Now the world will say, that in these three cases old certitudes were lost, and new were gained; but it is not so: each of the three men started with just one certitude, as he would have himself professed, had he examined himself narrowly; and he carried it out and carried it with him into a new system of belief. He was true to that one conviction from first to last; and on looking back on the past, would perhaps insist upon this, and say he had really been consistent all through, when others made much of his great changes in religious opinion. He has indeed made serious additions to his initial ruling principle, but he has lost no conviction of which he was originally possessed.[13]

If Newman is correct, we each have certain core certitudes that form, we might say, the foundation of our individual worldview. These are the axioms upon which we develop our wider perspectives on life and which reflect our basic orientation towards reality: including ultimate reality. We hold these axioms so profoundly that, unless we are predisposed to become philosophers or theologians, they often remain implicit. It would typically require a massively traumatic experience to shake them, so fundamental are they to our understanding and perception of the events that make up our existence in this world. And one of the reasons there is no unanimity in the realm of religion and philosophy is that even the keenest logical minds require these basic, fundamental axioms in order to operate coherently. Thus, one might construct the greatest logical edifice conceivable in defence of one's worldview, but the following statement of William James would nevertheless hold true. According to James, even the most rigorously argued, rational philosophy of religion:

> fails to prove its pretension to be "objectively" convincing. . . . It does not banish differences; it founds schools and sects just as feeling does. I believe, in fact, that the logical reason of man operates in this field of divinity exactly as it has always operated in love, or in patriotism, or in politics, or in any other of the wider affairs of life, in which our passions or our mystical intuitions fix

13 John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (New York: The Catholic Publication Society, 1870), 234–36.

> our beliefs beforehand. It finds arguments for our convictions, for indeed it *has* to find them. It amplifies and defines our faith and dignifies it and lends it words and plausibility.[14]

Let us take it as given, then, that each person possesses what we might call a basic worldview and orientation towards reality. I would not argue that it is impossible for this worldview or orientation to change. Indeed, it is likely that it is changing in subtle ways all the time, being reinforced or challenged by one's experiences on a daily level. One function of spiritual practice is precisely to cultivate experiences which reinforce one's worldview, but which also serve to deepen it. Deepening is also a type of change.

Again, I am proposing an orientation towards reality so basic that it would typically require a truly dramatic and life-changing event to shake it in a major way. Following Newman, though, I would differentiate this basic orientation from one's outwardly expressed religious identity. In each of the cases which Newman cites – the Protestant who became a Catholic, the Protestant who became a Unitarian, and the Protestant who became a Deist and then an Atheist – the outward identification has shifted, but the basic orientation has remained the same: faith in the divinity of Christ, in the first case, trust in the rational interpretation of scripture in the second, and a deep commitment to the sanctity of human freedom in the third.

I would not, however, wish to advance the distinction between one's outward identity and inward orientation in a way that would preclude the possibility that one's outward identification and inner orientation can have strong influences upon one another. Nor would I wish to push the distinction between inner life and outward identity in such a way as to suggest that these two are not intimately interrelated or are not shaping one another from one moment to the next. Indeed, as just mentioned, numerous practices exist, specific to particular religious communities, which serve precisely to reinforce, in a very psychologically and spiritually powerful way, one's commitment to specific teachings of the religious community in question, and to strengthen one's identity as a practitioner in that tradition to such a degree that it may, in many cases, be difficult to discern which of one's beliefs form part of one's core orientation towards reality and which are solely a function of one's outward affiliation.[15] It may even be that, in many cases – perhaps most cases – where adherence is especially strong and where one's identification with a particular tradition itself forms part of the core of one's spiritual orientation, the distinction I am making ceases to be meaningful at all. This might even be the ideal state from the perspective of one who takes exclusive identification with a singular tradition to be definitive of faithful adherence to that tradition,

14 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 436.

15 Such practices are termed belief-forming or *doxastic* practices by, among others, philosopher of religion William J. Alston. See Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014)

though even such an exclusive orientation towards religious identity could allow for variety in terms of culture, the specific details of practice, and so on.[16] The fact that this need not always be the case, however, is illustrated precisely by the phenomena of dual and multiple religious belonging.

When the inner and the outer conflict: the case of conversion

When reflecting either on conversion or on dual or multiple religious belonging, we are not in the realm of exclusive religious adherence. We are in a realm in which a relationship other than simple identity must be posited between the religiously believing and practising person and the religious traditions in which that person participates. What is the nature of this relationship?

My proposal, based on the reflections of both Newman and James, as well as my own experience, is that, broadly speaking, we are discussing the relationship between a person with a more or less stable and coherent core of commitments – commitments which collectively constitute the person's basic orientation towards reality – and a wider penumbra of beliefs and practices which are provided by religious traditions and which can either support or be in tension with this deeper core. This core need not be theorised as an essential self – such as the Vedāntic *ātman* or *jīva* – but simply as a very stubbornly enduring sense of reality which a person tends to carry with them, even as other aspects of identity shift through time. This core can also change, but it does so much more slowly than the wider penumbra of belief and practice which is typically used to determine one's religious identity.

In the case of conversion, or at least in those cases where my hypothesis holds true, what seems to be occurring is that the believing and practising religious person gradually finds that the religious tradition with which she identifies – in all likelihood, by happening to be born into it – does not cohere well with her most basic and deeply held commitments. This situation, to again cite MacIntyre, constitutes an epistemological crisis. At some point – either abruptly or, possibly more often, as a result of a prolonged spiritual quest – the religious person finds another tradition that fits her orientation to reality better than her tradition of origin. She then begins to identify with this tradition, perhaps even to the point of transitioning from her community of origin to the community that upholds her new tradition. This is the process generally referred to in anglophone discourse on this topic as *conversion*.[17]

16 One might affirm, for example, the necessity of exclusive adherence to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church while nevertheless allowing for varieties in terms of the practice of, say, Irish Catholics, Polish Catholics, and Mexican Catholics.

17 One could also "convert" to being non-religious: that is, one could choose to follow no tradition at all. This would be a somewhat extended meaning of the usual sense of "convert" as going from one religious community to another, but there is no reason to preclude it as a possibility. Again, Newman includes the example of atheism in his discussion.

I will note, though, that a prominent swath of the contemporary Hindu community, particularly in the Hindu Diaspora, is, on the whole, deeply uncomfortable with this term. In the words of Dr. Uma Mysorekar, President of the Hindu Temple Society of Flushing, New York, one of the oldest Hindu communities in the United States:

> Hindus don't believe in conversions. . . . We never convert anyone to Hinduism. But it is an individual's choice. If they choose to follow Hinduism, then they are most welcome. . . . Conversion is based on solicitation. We don't go and tell people, "Look, your religion is no good. But my religion is better, so come and follow Hinduism." No, that is not acceptable.[18]

Thus, when I use the term conversion, I am referring, specifically, to the process by which a person makes the transition from one religious identity to another, and not to any attempt to bring about this transition in another person: that is, to *proselytisation*. The late Swami Dayananda Saraswati, in fact, goes so far as to define proselytisation as a form of violence:

> Religious conversion *by missionary activity* remains an act of violence. It is an act of violence because it hurts deeply, not only the other members of the family of the converted, but the entire community that comes to know of it. One is connected to various persons in one's world. The religious person in every individual is the innermost, inasmuch as he or she is connected to a force beyond the empirical. The religious person is connected only to the force beyond [which] he has now accepted. That is the reason why the hurt caused by religion can turn into violence. That is why a religious belief can motivate a missionary to be a martyr. When the hurt of the religious becomes acute, it explodes into violence. Conversion is violence. It generates violence.[19]

When "the religious person in every individual," the innermost core of a person, where the person finds a connection with the all-pervading divinity in all beings, is disrupted, that disruption sends shockwaves, as it were, throughout the person's web of relations: the person's family and friends and the wider community of which that person is a member.

18 www.cc.com/video-clips/vtx5qc/the-colbert-report-barack-obama-s-church-search-dr-uma-mysorekar, accessed 10 June 2018. One could, of course, argue that there have been Hindu movements, both premodern and contemporary, that have engaged in and continue to engage in proselytizing. The sensibility of much of the Hindu community today, however, is one which is deeply uncomfortable with this phenomenon, as expressed by Mysorekar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Mohandas K. Gandhi, and others.

19 Swami Dayananda Saraswati, "Conversion is an Act of Violence," accessed January 24, 2018, www.swamij.com/conversion-violence.htm, emphasis mine. If one objects that any sharing of one's views becomes, on this definition, a form of violence, the question of intention becomes central. Sharing a perspective with another, for that person's consideration, is not the same as actively seeking a change in outward religious identity. This is why the "inner"-"outer" distinction remains an important one. Is one sharing the truth as one sees it, or actively seeking to advance one religious identity at the expense of another?

One could, of course, argue that this is true in cases where a person changes her religious identity due to primarily internal motivations, with minimal outside intervention, no less than in cases in which that change was actively sought by members of a different religious community. What is absent in the case of the inwardly motivated, as opposed to the solicited, conversion is the active, aggressive move by one community against another in order to win a new convert to its tradition. The community, and especially the family, of the religious convert, though, may yet feel a sense of hurt and betrayal, perhaps even, in some cases, heightened by the fact that this transition was freely chosen by their loved one, and so cannot be blamed on external forces.

If my hypothesis is correct, though, that, at least in some cases, conversion, or a change of religious identity, does not involve a change in the innermost core of a person so much as a recognition that one's external affiliation is inadequate to that core and that another tradition is a better "fit" for it, then one could argue that a freely chosen change of religious identity, so long as it is combined with sincere compassion for one's family and community of origin, and a concerted effort to show that one's change of identity is not a renunciation of all that one was before, but a reaffirmation of it in a new way, might mitigate the unintended hurt that such a change could evoke. It is important, in other words, to convert as "nonviolently" as possible, doing our best to ensure that our loved ones do not see our shift from one outward religious identity to another as a shift away from *them* as human beings, or from the good values they sought to instil in us: to correlate the two paths and emphasise their points of convergence. This appears to have been the intent of a letter written by George Harrison to his Roman Catholic mother as he adopted a Hindu philosophy of life:

> Thanks for your letter last week, and if it's any comfort to you, don't worry about me or don't think anything negative about Maharishi. He's not phony. . . . He's not taking any of our money. All he's doing is teaching us how to contact God. And as God is not divided into different sects as our religious leaders here make out by their prejudices, it doesn't affect my dedication to Sacred Heart in any way. It only strengthens it. . . . Don't think that I've gone off my rocker because I haven't. But I now love you and everybody else much more than ever. So, it's not that bad, is it?[20]

The case of dual or multiple religious belonging or participation

In the case of dual or multiple religious belonging, it seems that the believing and practising person does not find any *single* religious tradition to be adequate to her core commitments or orientation towards ultimate reality. She finds, rather, that many traditions are able to address different facets or aspects of her worldview and her life situation. In these cases, there is a felt need to draw upon more than

20 "George Harrison's Letter to His Mother," accessed 10 June 2018, www.hound-dog-media.com/2012/11/george-harrisons-letter-to-his-mother.html.

one tradition in order to sustain, fully and properly, one's spiritual life, and self-identify accordingly. If being *religious* is taken to imply a singular and exclusive commitment to a single tradition, the person might take up the label (or anti-label) of "spiritual but not religious." But there are others who are happy to see themselves as religious in a dual or multiple way and to refer to themselves as dual or multiple religious belongers: as Hindu Christians, Hindu Buddhists, etc.

The question here then becomes one of the meanings of *belonging* in contrast with *participation*. A contrast, it seems, needs to be drawn between these two similar, but distinct, phenomena. What would it mean truly to *belong* to two (or more) religious traditions? As Gavin D'Costa has argued, in his essay for this volume, each religious tradition possesses its own criteria of membership, its own definition of what it means to *belong* to that tradition. And, as he has further argued, there are cases in which one might meet the criteria of belonging to two or more traditions, so long as these criteria are not mutually exclusive.[21]

There are also cases, though, in which, according to D'Costa's account, one may make a claim to dual belonging that would be rejected by one or both of the traditions to which one wishes to claim membership. As D'Costa argues, if a case of Hindu-Christian dual belonging occurs in which the dual belonger affirms the necessity of Christ for salvation, seeing this salvation as being mediated through Hindu teachings and practices, then this will be a case, at least from the Christian side, of genuine dual belonging. And, as D'Costa rightly affirms, whether or not this will be the case from the Hindu side will depend on the particular Hindu tradition or traditions involved.

I can say that, from the perspective of my particular Hindu tradition, the term *Christ* is not seen as ultimately denoting a saving reality distinct from the various Hindu deities or the conceptions of divinity found in other religions. The Hindu frame of reference is different from the Abrahamic one, in which Christ is conceived as one deity among many possible rivals: a deity whose primacy and necessity for salvation is to be affirmed if one is to be defined as a Christian. From the point of view of Vedānta – the Vedānta of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda – there is only one divinity.[22] This divinity is, strictly speaking, infinite. It is therefore inconceivable to the finite mind and thus unconfinable within the bounds of any specific system of religious belief and practice.[23]

This sensibility is well captured within the prayer recited weekly in Vedānta Societies across the United States:

> *May the Divine Being who is*
> *The Father in Heaven of the Christians*,

21 Gavin D'Costa, "Considering the Case of Catholic-Hindu Dual Belonging from a Magisterial and Dogmatic Point of View," In this volume (2021).

22 This – amusingly, in my opinion – raises the question, "Who are the true monotheists?"

23 For an excellent explication of the perspective of Ramakrishna, see Ayon Maharaj, *Infinite Paths to Infinite Reality: Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Holy One of the Jewish faith,
Allah of the Muslims,
Buddha of the Buddhists
Dao of the Daoists,
Ahura Mazda of the Zoroastrians,
The Great Spirit of the Native Americans,
and Brahman of the Hindus,
Lead us
from the unreal to the Real
from darkness to Light,
from death to Immortality.
May we be granted
strength, freedom and clear understanding.
May we learn to see God
in our own hearts and in everyone around us.
May God bless us all
and fill our hearts with gratitude, grace and love.
Oṃ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ śāntiḥ
Peace. Peace. Peace be unto all.[24]

Whether, from a Christian perspective, dual belonging with the Ramakrishna tradition is possible, according to D'Costa's criteria (rooted in his interpretation of official Catholic teaching), depends on whether, by *Christ*, one is referring to the one, infinite saving reality, or to one of many possible *iṣṭadevatā*-s, or forms of divinity, that one may take as one's object of devotion, or *bhakti*, in the practice of one's *sādhana*, or spiritual discipline. "Without Christ there is no salvation" is thus a statement a Hindu of this tradition can either affirm or reject, depending upon the referent the term *Christ* is intended to have. If the meaning is, "without the one infinite saving reality who is called, among other names, Christ, there is no salvation," then this statement will be taken to be true. If the meaning is, "if one does not take the historical person of Jesus Christ as taught in the Catholic Church as one's *iṣṭadevatā*, then there is no salvation," then this statement will be taken not only to be false, but to be an assertion of violence against adherents of all other forms of divinity, and thus a highly inappropriate statement for a Hindu to make. If there were such a thing as a single authoritative Hindu teaching magisterium, this statement would be declared heretical. It is widely perceived as such by many contemporary Hindus.

It may be that, on a strict reading – that is, a reading of dual religious belonging as involving strong coherence between the criteria for membership of the traditions concerned – there are relatively few true dual religious belongers in the world, the bar for such belonging being a relatively high one. What seems to be

24 Vedanta Society, "Satsang Prayers," accessed 17 October 2020, https://vedantasociety.net/satsang-prayers.

far more common is dual or multiple religious *participation* – a conclusion that Pohran also arrives at in this volume where, based on ethnographic fieldwork, she interrogates the assumption that participation necessarily leads to belonging. I would define this kind of religious practice, for which the bar is far lower, to involve any level of religious activity or belief that draws upon two or more religious practices or belief systems, but without regard to whether the community from whom these practices or beliefs are drawn would endorse one's use of those practices or beliefs. A multiple religious *participant*, then, could be seen as one who finds utility in the beliefs and practices of two or more religious traditions – in expressing and cultivating her core commitments – but who may or may not identify fully with multiple traditions, or be seen by the adherents of those traditions as a fellow adherent.

In Hindu traditions, as well as in religious traditions across Asia, from India to Japan, it is not at all uncommon to find both dual and multiple religious belonging *and* participation. The much less centralised and dogmatic nature of these traditions also tends to blur the line between belonging and participation. In some cases, multiple participation may even be an expected part of belonging. In Japanese Buddhism, for example, there are *kami*, Shinto deities, who are seen as manifestations of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the Mahāyāna pantheon. Engaging in Shinto practice that is aimed at showing reverence to these deities is thus seen as a properly Buddhist activity.[25] In Jain practice, the Hindu deities Gaṇeśa, Sarasvatī, and Lakṣmī are regularly revered, their images being present in the typical Jain temple. They are not seen as manifestations of a Supreme Being, as they are by Vedāntic Hindus, but merely as powerful and benevolent presences whose blessings it is perfectly proper to seek. It is thus a not uncommon occurrence for Jains and Hindus to offer worship to the same deities, sometimes in the same temple facilities and at the same time, as part of what might be seen as a wider "Hindu-Jain" community, with each group yet simultaneously retaining its own distinctive practices and beliefs that it observes on its own, in other settings. Whether these are cases of dual belonging or dual participation can be difficult to discern and may vary not only with the individual involved, but with the specific situation and ritual context.

There are also cases, in Hinduism, in which individuals participate in multiple religious traditions to express the ancient Hindu teaching that truth is to be found in many religions, and the practices of many religions are capable of leading one nearer to the realisation of one's inherent divinity, a teaching which many Hindus trace to the *Ṛig Veda*: *ekaṃ sat bahuḍhā viprā vadanti*. "The Real is one, though the wise speak of it in many ways."[26] A kind of theological "permission" to see God in the paths of many faiths is also found in the *Bhagavad Gītā*: "In whatever

25 William E. Deal and Brian Ruppert, *A Cultural History of Japanese Buddhism* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 96.

26 *Ṛg Veda* I.164.46. Translation mine.

way living beings approach me, thus do I receive them. All paths, Arjuna, lead to me."[27]

A prime example of such a pluralistic practice, and the most famous, would be the multireligious *sādhanas* of Sri Ramakrishna, who practised Vaiṣṇava, Śaiva, and Śākta theistic practices, as well as Advaita Vedānta (traditions internal to Hinduism) – and Christianity and Islam.

Sri Ramakrishna's serial religious participation

Ramakrishna did not, though, according to the accounts of his life, practise either dual or multiple religious belonging, in the sense we have been discussing here. He did not claim that he belonged to many religious traditions. He did not claim to be a Hindu-Christian-Muslim, for example, akin to Raimundo Panikkar's self-identification as a Christian-Hindu-Buddhist.

What Ramakrishna claimed was that he had perceived God directly using the various practices made available by different traditions. He did not claim to *belong* to any single tradition but rather to have *practised* many:

> I have practiced all religions – Hinduism, Islam, Christianity – and I have also followed the paths of the different Hindu sects. I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths. He who is called Krishna is also called Shiva, and bears the name of the Primal Energy, Jesus, and Allah as well – the same Rama with a thousand names.[28]

With regard to Christianity, for example, Sri Ramakrishna was never baptised, nor did he affiliate with a particular Christian community. Whenever he dedicated himself to a particular spiritual path, he practised it single-mindedly, to the exclusion of all others – even, in the case of his Islamic practice, setting aside the images of his beloved Hindu deities. Ramakrishna was, we might say, a *serial religious participant*. But he was not a serial religious *belonger*; for it is not clear that he ever set aside his core commitment to his basic (Hindu) worldview, in which he saw himself as pursuing varying paths to the realisation of the same ultimate divinity. Seeing the religions not as mutually exclusive identities but as so many strategies for the attainment of God realisation, the concepts of "identity" and "belonging" do not figure extensively into his philosophy. Indeed, this view of the world's religions is well summed up in his famous teaching, *yato mat, tato path*: "As many traditions, so many paths," which is typically glossed within the

27 *Bhagavad Gītā* 4:11. Translation mine. This verse was cited by Swami Vivekananda in his famous "Sisters and Brothers of America" welcome address given at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on 11 September 1893. Vivekananda clearly interprets this passage in the way that I have presented it. Swami Vivekananda, *Complete Works*, Vol. 1 (Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1979), 6.

28 Swami Nikhilananda, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* (New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942), 60.

tradition that takes his life and teaching as its basis as: "Each tradition is a path to realization."

If we take *yato mat, tato path* as a succinct statement of Sri Ramakrishna's worldview and his core orientation towards ultimate reality, we can see his singular commitment as being to this statement, or to the truth towards which it points, and his multiple religious participation through time – or serial religious participation – as an outward expression and reinforcement of this inner commitment. In Ramakrishna, then, one has an encapsulation of how one can possess both a singular commitment and yet participate in a wide array of religious practices.

My journey: from Christian to Hindu-Christian to Hindu with a Christian background

If I apply this heuristic of a singular inward commitment combined with a possibility of singular, dual, or multiple expressions in terms of religious belonging or participation, I find it illuminates my own journey on several levels. Like Newman's three converts from Protestantism, I find that there is a coherent core of belief – and to some extent, of practice – underlying each of its phases. I do not feel, inwardly, that I have, through my processes of "conversion," changed dramatically so much as I have found increasingly more adequate ways of expressing and experiencing my deepest commitments as a religious person. This is my response to the puzzlement and amazement that I sometimes encounter when people become aware that I have gone from identifying as a Christian of the Roman Catholic tradition to identifying as a Hindu in the tradition of Sri Ramakrishna. This appears to many people to be an incredibly drastic and almost unimaginable change – probably due to stereotyped conceptions that they hold of both traditions – while, in my own mind, it seems quite natural. To again cite Newman:

> Now the world will say, that in these three cases old certitudes were lost, and new were gained; but it is not so: each of the three men started with just one certitude, as he would have himself professed, had he examined himself narrowly; and he carried it out and carried it with him into a new system of belief. He was true to that one conviction from first to last; and on looking back on the past, would perhaps insist upon this, and say he had really been consistent all through, when others made much of his great changes in religious opinion. He has indeed made serious additions to his initial ruling principle, but he has lost no conviction of which he was originally possessed.[29]

The wider penumbra of beliefs and practices that have sustained my core commitments may have changed; but my core commitments have not. These core commitments, as can be discerned from the story of my journey, are to a belief in the all-pervasiveness and essential goodness of God (i.e. in the idea of God

29 Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 234–36.

as both loving and just), a belief in the free will of living beings (that we are not coerced, but gently guided, by God towards our highest good), and a belief in our own essential goodness (or inherent divinity, the difference between our essential goodness and that of God is that the essential goodness of God is, always and everywhere, perfectly manifested, while ours is, until we achieve our ultimate goal of God realisation, still in the process of manifestation).

A very brief way to describe my journey is as a gradual understanding that the teachings of Vedānta are a better fit for these core commitments than the Catholic teachings with which I was raised, although these Catholic teachings did a good deal to nurture these very same commitments in my formative years. My attitude towards the tradition of my upbringing is thus not, as many might expect, one of strong negativity or aversion, but of gratitude: albeit a gratitude combined with an understanding that I have moved on to a different tradition that has better reflected and sustained my worldview and orientation towards ultimate reality than the one to which I was born.

One phase of my journey was a period of dual religious belonging. I did not, however, find this to be a sustainable mode of being. This was due to factors that were possibly idiosyncratic to my own experience; but, in short, I found that my claim to still be, in some sense, Christian, was constantly challenged by others, who found my belief in reincarnation and many paths to the infinite to be at odds with what they took to be core Christian commitments. Eventually, I simply tired of engaging in these arguments and finally said, "Okay, then. I'm not a Christian." This felt like the lifting of a burden. I should note, though, that the fact that I did not find living as a Hindu-Christian (or, as I described it at the time, a Hindu-Catholic) to be sustainable should not be taken as a judgement that a dual identity cannot be sustainable for anyone else or that self-described Hindu-Christians are mistaken in so characterising themselves. I am committed to the principle that we each have the right to define ourselves and religiously speaking and that the choices others make about their self-definition are also to be respected.

My own conclusion that identifying myself in terms of dual belonging was, for me, unsustainable, was in part connected with my desire to pursue a career as a theologian and philosopher of religion. As a "private citizen," it is likely that I could have continued as a dual belonger. Taking public stances, though, requires one to "choose a side," with the reactions this inevitably entails.

Conclusion

In summary, I do not view my process of moving from a Christian identity to a Hindu-Christian identity to a Hindu identity as a process of changing "sides" or of shifting allegiances. In my own mind, my allegiance has always been clear and singular: to a basic worldview which – while it has changed, and continues to change, in specific details, as I continue to learn and to experience life – has remained quite stable throughout. What has changed is the community and the label that I find best sustains and captures my core commitments. No label is perfect. No singular identity is able to capture the full depth and richness of a

person's commitments and experiences. We use labels to navigate the world and to distinguish our views and practices from some groups and to connect them with others. The final aim, though, is a realisation which transcends all finite views and identities and draws us ever nearer to God: to the infinite reality; however, we conceive of It and by whatever name or names we call It, which binds us all, and in which we are ultimately one.

References

Alston, William J. *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014.

Berger, Peter L., and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.

Colbert, Stephen, and Uma Mysorekar. "Interview with Uma Mysorekar." *The Colbert Report*, 2007. Accessed June 10, 2018. www.cc.com/video-clips/vtx5qc/the-colbert-report-barack-obama-s-church-search – dr – uma-mysorekar.

Dayananda Saraswati, Swami. "Conversion Is an Act of Violence." Accessed January 24, 2018. www.swamij.com/conversion-violence.htm.

D'Costa, Gavin. "Considering the Case of Catholic-Hindu Dual Belonging from a Magisterial and Dogmatic Point of View." In this volume (2021).

Deal, William E., and Brian Ruppert. *A Cultural History of Japanese Buddhism*. Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.

Fingarette, Herbert Fingarette. *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998.

Gandhi, Mohandas K. *Hindu Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Rajghat, Varanasi: Sarva Seva Sangh Prakashan, 2020.

Goldberg, Philip. *American Veda: From Emerson and the Beatles to Yoga and Meditation – How Indian Spirituality Changed the West*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2010.

Hanh, Thich Nhat Hanh. *Living Buddha, Living Christ*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995.

Harrison, George. "George Harrison's Letter to His Mother." 1967. Accessed June 10, 2018. www.hound-dog-media.com/2012/11/george-harrisons-letter-to-his-mother.html.

James, William James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

Long, Jeffery D. *Hinduism in America: A Convergence of Worlds*. London: Bloomsbury, 2020.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988.

Maharaj, Ayon Maharaj. *Infinite Paths to Infinite Reality: Sri Ramakrishna and Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Newman, John Henry. *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. New York: The Catholic Publication Society, 1870.

Nikhilananda, Swami. *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*. New York: Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Center, 1942.

Richards, Glyn, ed. *A Sourcebook of Modern Hinduism*. Richmond, Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1985.

Tyagananda, Swami. Ramakrishna Vedanta Society of Boston. 2020. "Satsang Prayers." Accessed October 17, 2020. https://vedantasociety.net/satsang-prayers.

Vivekananda, Swami. *Complete Works*, vol. 1. Mayavati: Advaita Ashrama, 1979.

Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Corrected ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978.

10 The struggle of belonging

Considering some on-the-ground realities of multiple religious orientation[1]

Nadya Pohran

During the last seven or so years, in both my academic pursuits and my personal life, I have encountered and grappled with (at least) two scenarios which are especially pertinent to the topic of dual (or, rather, multiple) belonging. In some ways, they are two sides of the very same coin, but I want us to consider them as distinct. They are:

1 Individuals who wish to participate in (or even "belong to") a particular religious or spiritual community (or perhaps even more than one!), but for whatever reason feel that they cannot.
2 Religious or spiritual communities who wish to welcome individuals into their midst, but who nonetheless sometimes struggle to form or inhabit a social space in which individuals can belong.

As I demonstrate, there is a significant difference between multiple religious participation and multiple religious *belonging:* belonging requires the consent of the community (or communities) in which an individual seeks to belong.

As an ethnographer, my thoughts surrounding these topics are grounded in my fieldsite – a Christian ashram in the north of India, one which I believe is a fertile ground for exploring key concepts relating to the experiences of individuals who have more than one religious identity – henceforth multiple religious individuals. I carried out my fieldwork at Sat Tal Christian Ashram (henceforth STA) primarily in 2016–2017 and then supplemented this longer stay with a shorter two-month visit in 2019. I continue to return to STA and maintain contact with people connected to it, but my thoughts in this chapter are based primarily on those two visits. I hasten to admit, terms like "multiple religious orientation" are *not* terms that are readily used in the conversations at STA. My reason for blending conceptual

1 The period of fieldwork on which these reflections are based was financially supported by the Cambridge International Trust, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada), the Teape Trust, and the Spalding Trust. On a more personal note, I am grateful to the individuals of STA and WA who shared their experiences with me. I also give gratitude to Ankur Barua, Jeanine Diller, and Jeffery D. Long for providing insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-10

and categorical terminology (which are often clean and orderly, due to the nature of categorising) with ethnographic observations (which are often messy and muddled, due to the complexity of human experiences being lived out on-the-ground) is, simply put, because I think they are both important in their own regard. The analytical categories of, and the philosophical and theological discussions surrounding, multiple religious orientation are interesting and important to me, but at the same time, I wish them to be challenged by, and grounded in, ethnographic data that provide us with the narratives of real people by and for whom these concepts are played out on a regular basis. As a cultural anthropologist who turns naturally to, if not operates comfortably within, theological-philosophical realms, I believe I can draw from my ethnographic data to speak to some of the key theological aspects – including both the motivating factors and the difficulties that arise – involved in multiple religious orientation. Thus, in addition to highlighting the more immediate and prominent topic of multiple religious orientation, I hope this chapter might also add something to the ongoing interdisciplinary exchanges between anthropology (of Christianity) and (Christian) theology.

While participating in interdisciplinary exchange sometimes makes me feel as if I am an amateur acrobat – bending over backward in my efforts to have something credible and possibly significant to say to the disciplines of both cultural anthropology and theology, all the while wondering if my feet will give out under me – I like to think of this acrobatic back-bending as a rather practical means of bridging what has often been conceptualised as a vast gulf between the two distinct disciplines. Elsewhere, I have argued that anthropologists who work in religious contexts can learn from theologians by intentionally adopting a methodological posture in which we candidly disclose our (religious) beliefs and doubts during our fieldwork processes.[2] Here, I seek to bridge the disciplinary gap in a different way: I provide detailed and nuanced ethnographic data concerning the lives and experiences of multiple religious individuals I observed at STA and consider that data in the context of theories put forth by philosophical theologians. While my ethnographic data does disrupt some of the clean-cut categories and analytical concepts being used by many theologians who explore the topic of multiple religious orientation, I hope that the rupture will prove to be, ultimately, a helpful one. In sum, the on-the-ground realities of STA highlight the need for a more nuanced understanding of how multiple religious individuals can integrate into, participate in, and belong to the spiritual and/or religious communities they seek to be a part of and which purport to welcome them in. Indeed, the actual process of "belonging" is often not nearly so easy as terms like "multiple religious belonging" sometimes make it appear. I believe that if we can nuance our understanding surrounding the process of belonging, then we might deepen the sense of belonging that is available to individuals who identify as multiple religious.

2 Pohran, "Belief-Inclusive Research: Does Strategically 'Bracketing Out' a Researcher's (Religious) Beliefs and Doubts Limit Access to Ethnographic Data?" forthcoming in Current Anthropology.

The first section of this chapter establishes some key terminologies surrounding the experiences of multiple religious individuals; I situate my terminology choices with reference to ongoing discussions within Theology Without Walls (TWW) scholarship. I propose that we must deepen and nuance our understanding of *belonging* and that, specifically, we must include communities in our considerations. It is not sufficient to explore multiple religious *belonging* as an individualised phenomenon. Then, in section 2 of this chapter, I interrupt my exploration with ethnographic data – I've selected vignettes from my fieldwork at STA which will help nuance and ground our discussion. The ethnography acts, in part, as a justification for the argument I put forth in the first section and, as we shall see, it pushes us to pivot our understanding of *belonging:* the ethnography shows that experiencing an existential *belonging to* a religious and/or spiritual community or tradition is notably different from *affiliating with* the same tradition or community.

Exploring theoretical frameworks

The Introduction to this volume outlines some key terms like "multiple (dual) religious" and provides some examples of the various ways that, in the Hindu-Christian context that we are exploring, someone might live out their dual religious identity.[3] But I argue that those possible descriptions of being a "Hindu-Christian" or a "Hindu Christian" or a "Hindu and Christian," etc., are what we might simply call multiple religious *existing*, since, as I shall make clearer, it is possible for an individual to inhabit any number of these identities without feeling that they are *belonging*.

Two TWW scholars, Peter Feldmeier and Jeanine Diller, have classified the multiple religious concept into several stages. Peter Feldmeier identifies four distinct ways of engaging in some form of (what he refers to as) multiple religious belonging (MRB).[4] In sum, they are: (F1) Allowing "one's own religion to be influenced by the religious imagination of the auxiliary religion" (this form is identified mainly with Francis Clooney);[5] (F2) engaging in some official practices

3 See page 7 of this volume.

4 Peter Feldmeier, "Perils and Possibilities of Multiple Religions Belonging: Test Case in Roman Catholicism," *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (2017): 73–89.

5 As it will become clearer in the following paragraphs, I want to be carefully reflective of whether or not the term "dual belonging" appropriately reflects the degree of belonging experienced by the individual. In Clooney's particular case, *belonging to* another tradition other than his Christian faith is simply not a need that he feels; he finds his Christian faith to be "the single, deep and sufficient foundation." While anyone familiar with Clooney's work cannot help but note the depth of sustained interaction with which he approaches his encounters with Hinduism, Clooney has been adamant that his religious identity is singular, not dual. See, for example, Clooney's self-description from an email correspondence with me on 3 July 2021. Speaking of his ~50 years of deep engagement with Hindu traditions, he writes, "I don't name this reality as a dual belonging with a hyphen 'Hindu-Christian' or 'Catholic-Hindu' – since I keep finding that my Christian faith remains the single, deep, and sufficient foundation for me. . . . Can a Jesuit, by definition and by grace a companion of Jesus in his life, death, and resurrection, bear a hyphenated identity? I have my doubts about that hyphen, even if I know that no human being is 100% simple; in a certain way, we are

of a second religion but still identifying solely as a Christian (Feldmeier provides Robert Kennedy, both a Roman Catholic Priest and a Zen Roshi, as an example of this category);[7] (F3) identifying primarily with Christianity but holding a secondary descriptive identity, such as "Buddhist-Christian" or "Hindu-Christian"; and (F4) holding onto two or more models of potentially contradictory worldviews and viewing them both as true (Henri le Saux, Raimon Panikkar, Paul Knitter, etc.). One can note that Feldmeier's first two ways of engaging in MRB continue to maintain the exclusive and sole identity of "Christian," while the latter two allow for some intermingling and even supplanting of a singular primary religious identity.

Jeanine Diller also identifies several categories which are useful to our discussion here – though it is worth noting the fact that she refers to the phenomenon as multiple religious orientation (MRO) – a term I also choose to use, for reasons which will become evident soon.[6] Diller identifies four distinct categories before arriving at comparative theology in a way that resembles the work of Francis Clooney. Diller's first two categories – (D1) conceptual openness and (D2) material contact – do not require the same level of engagement, commitment, or even participation as her latter categories. Her third and fourth categories – (D3) interfaith collaboration and (D4) dialogue – require more active participation with and alongside people of other faith commitments but do not necessitate that one change one's own beliefs/practices as a result from the increased interaction (though, as comparative theologians frequently tell us, it is rare to engage in genuine dialogue with others without some changes to one's own perspective/practice).[8] Reflecting on these first four categories, Diller notes that "they are all ways of learning about [another religion] from the outside, watching or hearing about or working alongside others who are doing it. The latter categories go progressively deeper because in them one engages in the tradition *oneself,* from the inside. These represent a new level of intensity of participation, different not just in degree but in kind."[7] Diller's latter five categories are ones which, as she rightly draws our attention to, are higher risk in that they necessitate individual participation. In fact, Diller outlines four entire phases before reaching engagement with multiple religious traditions by way of comparative theology; her fifth category correlates to Feldmeier's first category. Her latter five categories include (D5) comparative theology; (D6) adopting belief(s); (D7) adopting practice(s), which Diller recognises to be a multilayered phenomenon where

---

all hyphenated, are we not? But by faith, we can have a single and intense core to who we are. . . . So, I prefer to describe myself simply as a Jesuit who has for nearly 50 years been encountering Hindu wisdom, affected in ways that everyone can see in what I write, how I teach. I might add that a term such as "Hindu-Christian" risks turning out to be a theoretical take away, a label that seems to define someone as a person, now inserted in a particular category, even while distracting readers from the ongoing practice of vulnerable learning that is so potent in its particularity, however one might name it."

6 Jeanine Diller, "Multiple Religious Orientation," *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016): 338–53.

7 Ibid., 342.

				F1: Being influenced by	F2: Engaging with		F3: Identifying as	F4: Holding onto contradictions	
D1: Conceptual openness	D2: Material contact	D3: Interfaith collaboration	D4: Dialogue	D5: Comparative theology	D6: Adopting beliefs	D7: Adopting practices	D8: Identity		D9: Belonging

Figure 10.1 Comparing Feldmeier's and Diller's models

both the stakes and the depth of engagement can vary immensely; (D8) identity; and (D9) belonging.

It seems particularly fitting to look at Diller's and Feldmeier's two models side by side since the respective authors were in dialogue with each other while thinking through some of the questions which inspired their respective papers.[8] As Figure 10.1 shows, there are many correspondences between the two scholars' categories and yet, importantly, D9 ("belonging") is left totally unaddressed by Feldmeier's model. Indeed, Feldmeier's final phase seems to be wrapped up in an individual's ability to perform a theological balancing act of sorts – that is, to grapple *as an individual* rather than to belong to a community.

That is to say, while both Feldmeier's and Diller's models sketch a continuum (in that the farther an individual travels along their respective categories, the deeper one is understood to participate in multiple religions), only Diller's model clearly marks a category called "belonging" as distinct from the other forms of engaging with multiple religious traditions. It seems likely that Feldmeier's exclusion of "belonging" as a specific category is because Feldmeier's own model is grounded in his discussion of multiple religious *belonging*, and therefore, belonging is assumed.

Reflecting on these categories as an ethnographer, it strikes me that it is of the utmost importance to reserve "belonging" as a separate phase of MRO. Indeed, scholars who reflect on the dynamic processes of multiple religious individuals (and individuals who live out their lives as such!) cannot assume that belonging occurs readily. Crucially, belonging relies upon acceptance by the religious community (or communities) in question rather than strictly the self-identification of the individual. We might pose the question in this way: if an individual says, "I belong in this church, because I self-identify as a Christian!" is this claim equivalent to, or concurrent with, that same Christian community accepting that individual's self-identification? I contend that it is not just the individual who can decide when to belong to a community; the community has to also invite or allow the individual to belong.

The anthropologist Jacob Loewen experienced a fascinating, albeit somewhat humorous, example of how it is the broader community, not the individual, who

8 Ibid., 350.

chooses whether that individual truly belongs. Loewen describes working alongside a Christian missionary, named David, in Panama. Despite their eagerness to be involved, both David and Loewen were excluded from the community's healing rituals due to what the community described – somewhat ironically – as the missionaries' "lack of faith." The community interpreted certain biblical passages on healing (which had been originally shared with them by the same missionaries) to mean that authentic faith was required for healing results. But because the Loewen and David favoured traditionally "Western" medical views of healing over the concept of faith-based prayer healing, the community intentionally excluded them from the community's prayer time. Loewen recalls the leading men of the church apologetically pulling him aside and saying, "I am sorry, but [the healing] doesn't work when you and David are in the circle. You and David don't really believe."[9] In the case of David and Loewen, it was the broader community, not the individuals, who could dictate who really belonged. There are countless other examples I could pull from ethnographic literature which similarly document the extent to which *belonging* is determined by the broader community. For example, even after Joseph Webster assured his interlocutors in Gamrie that he was himself a Christian, they continued to "interrogate" him about his religious beliefs and refused to accept his self-identification as a Christian – even though Webster proclaimed his Christian faith in both verbal and written form.[10]

The crucial point to take away from this is that *belonging* in a religious and/or spiritual context seems to require *both* self-identification as a particular brand of religious worldview *and* acceptance on the part of a larger religious community. We cannot belong, even if we identify *as* and participate with – and indeed even if we long to belong within – unless a community accepts us as a belonger. Thus, I argue that it is unwarranted to assume that multiple religious *belonging* occurs simply on account of a multiple religious individual wishing for it to occur. Indeed, considering some on-the-ground realities of multiple religious individuals reveals that *belonging* is a complicated (and, at times, messy) process.

This leads me to define what I mean by "belonging." While multiple religious *existing* could be a suitable term to describe an individual who has actively drawn upon multiple religious influences in forming their own spiritual identity, multiple religious *belonging* additionally entails some degree of, to risk a tautology, belonging. So, what exactly does it mean to belong? I understand belonging as two-fold. (1) The word "belong" is rooted in the Old English word "*gelang*," which the OED defines as being "at hand, together with." From this etymological observation, I draw the notion that *belonging* necessitates some sense of physical connection, in that the sense of belonging emerges out of a proximal togetherness

9 C. Roderick Wilson, "Seeing They See Not," in *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, eds. David Earl Young and Jean Guy Goulet (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 202–4.

10 Joseph Webster, *The Anthropology of Protestantism: Faith and Crisis among Scottish Fishermen*, 1st ed., Contemporary Anthropology of Religion (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 15–20.

with other individuals. To belong is to be "together with." (2) Additionally, I understand belonging to include an emotional and psychological component in the way that leading public figures like Brené Brown have spoken of belonging – feeling that one's entire self is wholly accepted without judgement or conditions. Brown describes this as living vulnerably. It might be a helpful and even crucial clarification point to here think of vulnerability not as weakness nor as someone who is at risk of being attacked; rather, to be vulnerable in this sense is to be unguarded due to a confidence that any form of "protective armour" is simply not needed.[11] Speaking of vulnerability along similar lines, Jean Vanier, a Catholic philosopher and the founder of l'Arche community projects, describes a community as a place where one must "come out of one's shell of protection, to become vulnerable in order to love and understand others, to call them forth as special and unique, to share and to give space and nourishment to them . . . Community is the place where people grow in love and in peace-making."[12] By belonging to such communities where individuals can feel fully accepted, Vanier claims, individuals "are earthed and find their identity."[13]

So, belonging as I am discussing it here refers to both a feeling of "togetherness" and also the feeling that one can be accepted as their whole identity without feeling a need to hide any part of it. With this two-fold understanding of belonging, we might ask: where do multiple religious individuals belong? Namely, who are the other individuals who form their proximal communities, and who is it alongside whom they can feel wholly accepted, or feel that no part of themselves must be either hidden with a protective armour or strategically placed to the side whenever they are within that community setting, lest they be "ousted"?

Let us explore these questions briefly with the example of a Hindu-Christian – that is, someone who identifies as a sort of "hybrid," drawing upon both Hinduism and Christianity. A Hindu-Christian might feel that she belongs to a particular Hindu community – perhaps sharing the same guru as others – while at the same time belonging to a particular Christian community – perhaps participating in a weekly bible study through her church. Certainly, this simultaneous belonging to two distinct communities can occur, as is evidenced by the proclamations of self-professed "dual belongers," particularly among the scholars who write autobiographically about their experiences as dual belongers.[14] Diller gives examples of several individuals who practise interreligious theology with "a certain naturalness" (such as those who observe the holidays of multiple distinct religious groups, perhaps due to marrying into a religion different than their own). But scholars of religion know all too well that religious identities, perhaps especially hybrid religious identities, do not all follow a singular or even predictable pattern.

11 Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone* (New York: Random House, 2017).

12 Jean Vanier, *Community and Growth*, Rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 31.

13 Ibid., 12.

14 See, as one example among many, the works of Paul Knitter. The term "double belonger" is sometimes used rather than "dual belonger" but the sentiment is, from what I can tell, the same.

As such, we recognise that a Hindu-Christian might very well *not* find that that she can belong simultaneously to two distinct communities – that is, one which is Hindu and one which is Christian. Instead, she might feel that she only *belongs* to a community comprised of other similarly hybrid individuals – in this case, a community comprised entirely of Hindu-Christians – which can be significantly more difficult to find than either a specific Christian or a specific Hindu community. And still, a third possibility is that she feels that she does not fully belong to any community.[15]

In this third scenario, which I want to highlight, she might very well be "together with" other individuals in either a Christian or a Hindu community (thereby experiencing the first element of our definition of belonging) while at the same time not fully feeling that she is wholly accepted by that same community, or those same communities, thereby lacking the second part of the experience of belonging. And, perhaps as either an intentional or unintentional response to feeling that she does not belong, she might eventually shy away from being "together with" such communities at all. This is true in navigating all facets of our identity – not just those that can be summed up with reference to a religious tradition. In North America in particular, several individuals have noted the ways in which an individual's difficulty to attain a sense of deep belonging within a religious community leads them to distance themselves from it – we see this play out rather prominently among the experiences of LGBTQ Christians who speak of painfully leaving their Christian communities due to a lack of experiential belonging.[16]

The inescapable reality that *belonging* does not always occur even when an individual self-identifies with one (or more!) particular religion(s) – and, indeed, even when the individual *desires* to belong – challenges what seem to me to be some of the fundamental assumptions of much of the theological reflections pertaining to multiple religious individuals – including the recent Theology Without Walls (TWW) scholarship. TWW first made an appearance at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting in 2015, and there is a good reason to link it directly to the exploration of multiple religious belonging. One of the most clearly articulated arguments to link multiple religious belonging and TWW is made by Paul Knitter, who argues that "the practice of double religious belonging is a synonym for, or lays the foundation for, the practice of theology without walls."[17] In the same journal edition, scholars such as S. Mark Heim also suggest a link between what Heim refers to as "people who are hybrid in their religious identities and practices" (or even simply individuals who are not firmly embedded

15 Rory McEntee, "Interspiritual Theology as a Radical Potential for New Vistas in Theological Thought," *Open Theology* 2 (2016): 391–99; Rory McEntee, "The Religious Quest as Transformative Journey: Interspiritual Religious Belonging and The Problem of Religious Depth," *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (November 27, 2017): 613–29. See also Feldmeier, "Perils and Possibilities" who raises this concern even more poignantly with reference to the TWW project.

16 Amber Cantorna, *Unashamed* (Louisville, Kentucky: WJK BOOKS, 2019), 143.

17 Paul Knitter, "Without Walls = Multiple Belonging?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51 (2016): 492.

in a singular home tradition) and TWW.[18] Not all TWW theologians identify as dual or multiple belongers, but multiple religious belonging has nonetheless been a focal point of much of the TWW scholarship, and some scholars hope that the TWW endeavours might be able to offer theological frameworks for spiritual seekers who reside outside of religious traditions.[19] As I read through the works of a number of scholars who engage with the TWW project, there seems to be an assumption that multiple religious *existing* readily leads into multiple religious *belonging*. Again, this is seen most clearly in the work of Knitter who writes that "[the double belonger] finds oneself, surprisingly, at home in both [the primary and newfound traditions.]"[20] But I contend that this sort of belonging is not always the case.

As such, we need to be more careful and nuanced in our vocabulary. To call this "double belonging," "dual religious belonging," or "multiple religious belonging" (or any variant of these) seems to suggest a feeling of at-home that is not always present in the lived realities of those who navigate these spiritual waters. I think, as Jeffery D. Long's work in this volume highlights, that there is a crucial distinction between *belonging* to a tradition versus *practicing* (parts of) it. As Long writes about Ramakrishna, "He did not claim that he belonged to many religious traditions. He did not claim to be a Hindu-Christian. . . . He did not claim to *belong* to any single tradition, but rather to have *practiced* many."[21] While Long invokes the example of Ramakrishna for a different argument than my own (Long highlights the ways in which Ramakrishna found belonging in his own sense of self, rather than looking for it from a community), the lesson learnt is applicable to this context as well: participation within, or practice of, a religious tradition is not the same as belonging.

This crucial distinction between personal practice or affiliation and *belonging* will become clearer in our next section, as we consider the on-the-ground realities of STA in which *belonging* proved to be a genuine struggle – both for the spiritual community who strived to be a place where all individuals could *belong* and for the individuals who sought to take part in it.

Ethnographic experiences of multiple religious belonging

Having set the stage for our exploration with philosophical and theological frameworks, I want to now move our attention onto my fieldsite – a quiet, scenic, and picturesque Christian ashram located in the north of India, surrounded by freshwater lakes and innumerable songbirds. Sat Tal Christian Ashram (STA) was founded by E. Stanley Jones, an American Methodist missionary, in 1930. Jones

18 Mark Heim, "Of Two Minds about a Theology without Walls," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51 (2016): 486.

19 Personal communication with Jeffery D. Long, co-chair of the TWW project. March 2021.

20 Knitter, "Without Walls = Multiple Belonging?" 493.

21 See Jeffery D. Long's chapter in this volume.

was, without question, a Christian and did not himself identify as dual religious, though he did describe reinterpreting and restructuring his own Christian faith as a result of his time in India and, more specifically, from engaging with certain Hindu ideas and practices. At the same time, he was inspired by his Christian faith (which, especially as the years went on, Jones described as being deeply centred on the person of Jesus, rather than solely on Western (re)presentations of him) to strive to create a community which, in effect, welcomed people from a multitude of religious traditions. In Jones's own words, STA was to be a "miniature Kingdom of God" in which "people of the Christian faith, a different faith, or even no faith" could come and share in spiritual life together. Elsewhere, I explore in more detail the ways that Jones's vision for the ashram also included interreligious dialogue and even conversion (Jones's use of the word, and his subsequent hope for, "conversion" is not one that can be examined here). But Jones's vision was multifaceted and it cannot be denied that at least part of his vision for the ashram included a very strong focus on creating a space in which all individuals – regardless of their religious or spiritual belief – could belong. Jones envisioned STA Tal as a place where "anyone who sincerely desires to find God is welcome."[22] If Jones were using the same categorical terms that I am using in this chapter, he was striving to create a community in which *multiple religious individuals* were also welcome.

When it comes to STA, multiple religious identity is explored most clearly through considering the relational dynamics between STA and a group which I call World Amrita (WA). I am not here seeking to make a value judgement on the interactions between STA and WA or, even more broadly, to comment on whether STA has successfully carried out the vision contained within its origins. I leave it to the many capable hands within the community of STA itself to compare its present-day activities with the original vision; my focus is an exploration, not an evaluation. I consider the relational dynamics between STA and WA as a concrete example of some of the very real challenges in navigating belonging in a Christian context.

On an annual basis, STA runs some of its own programmes in which individuals come to participate in specifically designed ashram activities, but these only take place during 2–3 months of the year. In the remaining months (and sometimes also overlapping with these two–three months), STA frequently rents out its space to various groups who are keen to make use of the ashram's beautiful atmosphere for their own programmes and retreats. As far as I know, WA is the sole group, both present and past, which rents out the ashram space in order to run their own spiritual programme *and* which is not *explicitly Christian*.

WA is a small not-for-profit organisation whose founders' expressed goal is to offer spiritual "awakening" to seekers. The teacher (one of two founders) with whom I have interacted over the course of my ethnographic research, who I will

22 E. Stanley Jones, "E. Stanley Jones on the Ashram Ideal (1930)," in *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*, ed. M.K. Kuriakose (New Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2006), 347–49.

call Dana, draws from her experiences in Christianity, Hinduism, Jin Shin Jyutsu, Body-Mind Centering, and her love of poetry and the outdoors. Her teachings, and her own practices, are multiple religious. Dana herself is American but has lived in India for several years as both a student of various gurus and, since 1998, a spiritual teacher. The WA group facilitates silent meditation and "deep rest" retreats not only in India but also in Western Europe and North America; they first hosted one of their retreats at Sat Tal Christian ashram in 2002 and, barring the years during which they were not able to use the ashram space, they have returned to Sat Tal on an annual basis.

The topic of WA's use of the ashram for their own spiritual retreats frequently came up in conversations during my early months in the field as I spoke with a number of different individuals who live and work at STA. STA ashramites provided me with diverse descriptions about who WA is and what they do. Some of the less favourable descriptions were that the people who came to participate in a WA retreat were "lost" foreigners who were desperately searching for spirituality or that they were recovering drug addicts. Concerned by the impact that these "lost" spiritual seekers might have on the wider atmospheres of the STA, some STA ashramites (albeit a minority) went so far as to write a formal letter of complaint to the STA leadership, requesting them to banish WA once and for all. Other regular ashramites of STA, along with some of the management, were perfectly content to have the group members come to STA, and spoke pleasantly about WA's individual participants, but did wonder whether WA using STA's space for their own meditation retreats was truly the type of ecumenical engagement that Jones himself would have wanted. These ashramites emphasised that the individual participants of WA should indeed be welcomed to the ashram, but not as members of WA participating in a WA retreat. Rather, the ashramites proposed, WA individuals should join in STA's own programmes, thus intermingling with STA's own ashramites in order to hear about the teachings of Jesus that Jones had deemed to be so crucial to personal transformation. And still other ashramites were happy to have WA come and conduct their own meditation retreats which facilitated their own spiritual practices, but these ashramites lamented that they had always felt a deep sense of estrangement from the WA group. "And *that* [feeling estranged from others] is not how Ashram should be," a long-term STA ashramite once told me decisively. These controversies and differences of opinion surrounding WA's presence at STA are particularly interesting for me as an ethnographer because one way for anthropologists to understand people – and their values, beliefs, and motives – is to pay particular attention to the conflicts, tensions, and frictions which arise in social settings.

Although the context is perhaps atypical to the journeys of some multiple religious individuals (in that here we have a *group* of individuals seeking to experience some degree of belonging at STA), the relational dynamics between STA and WA nonetheless shed light on the difficult processes involved in navigating belonging as a multiple religious individual. WA – both its leaders and its members – could certainly be categorised as multiple religious. Indeed, as Dana told me in one of our conversations, the group's original name before it became

"World Amrita" was "Sangha Without Walls" – strikingly similar to the name of the TWW group whose theories I am drawing upon. This was a name that Dana had selected due to the ways it conveyed the warm note of hospitality to individuals from a myriad of diverse faith backgrounds – including individuals who, like Dana herself, drew upon more than one religious tradition – who could all feel welcomed into their *sangha* (spiritual family). Furthermore, as I mentioned previously, Dana herself intentionally incorporates practices and techniques from multiple distinct religious traditions into her meditation classes, resulting in all participants of WA receiving spiritual teachings influenced by, and inspired from, numerous different religious traditions. Moreover, a number of WA participants whom I spoke with after the WA retreats in 2017 and 2018 individually conveyed to me that, even outside their time at WA retreats, they themselves drew upon multiple religious traditions, including Christianity, in formulating their own spiritual practices.

What I observed playing out at my ethnographic fieldsite, then – to gesture back to the "two sides of the same coin" phenomenon with which I opened this chapter – was: (1) several individuals from WA who participated in multiple religious traditions, including Christianity and (2) a *Christian* spiritual community which had sought to establish itself as a place where all individuals could feel welcome. So, where and how did *belonging* play a role within this ethnographic equation?

Suffice it to say, belonging was neither a simple nor a straightforward process for the relational dynamics that I observed. Rather than being a phase that one neatly arrives into in the spectrum of multiple religious orientation, or being something so naturally occurring that it need not be mentioned as a phase at all, my ethnographic research showed that belonging is in fact an extremely difficult and gruelling process to navigate for multiple religious individuals. Indeed, the ethnography shows that belonging itself is comprised of multiple phases through which individuals cycle in their search for a sense of belonging. Upon considering the ethnographic material, I noted four distinct stages[23]: invitation and welcome, restrictions, attempts of correction, and re-establishing belonging. By presenting them as four distinct phases, I do not mean to convey that I envision them as having a strictly linear and sequential progression; on the contrary, these four phases do not always occur chronologically, nor does entering one phase entail that one has finished entirely with the preceding phase. I offer glimpses from ethnographic fieldwork to highlight the ways that both WA and STA were forced to navigate belonging.

(1) Initial invitation and welcome: When Dana, one of the leaders of WA, first found out about STA, she thought that its remote location and tranquil environment would be an ideal spot to host her meditation retreats. In 2003, she

23 I explore these phases in more detail in both my PhD thesis and forthcoming monograph – here, we will only be able to touch upon them briefly.

arranged meeting with STA management, and during their meeting, it was agreed that WA could start using STA to host its retreat that coming spring. Rather quickly, Dana explains, she and her group felt comfortable and welcomed at STA. This sense of wholehearted welcome was strongly felt not only by her but also by the other members of WA who attended retreats at STA.

(2) **Restricting the other:** In this phase, we explore what could be described as the oppositional pinnacle of belonging insofar as the straining of relationship between WA and STA is concerned: in 2008, in the middle of their month-long retreat at STA, WA was prohibited from using STA's chapel for their meditation practice. And, in 2010, WA was "banned" from returning to STA at all. There are somewhat contradictory stories about precisely what WA did which caused the STA leadership to feel uncomfortable with allowing WA to continue using STA's space. (Were two people from WA holding hands? Did the group worship Hindu gods and goddesses? Was the anonymous artwork – a handful of twigs and greenery, configured to resemble a seated meditation posture – once left on a common-room table for all to see, intended to be a "statue" of the Buddha? And, then, were the flowers later placed around these twigs indicative of the "statue" being revered as a sacred shrine? Perhaps, it was the chanting and singing of other sacred songs that occurred by candlelight in the evening hours? Were group members secretly doing drugs?) There were several ideas floating around regarding precisely what it was that WA had done to lose the trust of the STA leadership; these numerous possibilities were whispered among some STA ashramites and narrated to me in the early months of my stay at STA from August 2016 onwards. And, over a year later, when I became better acquainted with some of the teachers and participants of WA after attending my second annual retreat with WA in April 2017, I realised that many individuals from WA itself had similar levels of confusion and bewilderment concerning the matter.

But, for many of the individuals who regularly came to STA with WA, first being banned from using the chapel and, later, being uninvited to return to STA at all was not *just* a matter of what they were allowed to do or not do. It was, rather, a symbolic turning point in the relationship between WA and STA: WA no longer felt that they were free and welcome to conduct their spiritual practice with the exploratory openness that they had originally felt they were encouraged to undertake. "It says, right there, [that] 'people of all different faiths' are welcome," a member of WA once told me, emphatically gesturing towards the stone plaque on the main building's verandah which contained words from STA's founder. "So, yes, we were a bit surprised to realise that there were certain spiritual practices [that] we just could not do."

(3) **Attempts of correction:** As members of STA leadership negotiated how they could be a community which is open to multiple religious people and groups such as WA, but *still* retain their own sense of Christian identity and practice, and thus follow their own deeply held Christian values, STA leaders

agreed that it would be sensible to deliver a sermon to WA individuals which had been curated specifically for their ears. The sermon, which is intensely remembered both by WA individuals and by current members of STA leadership, was delivered by the ashram's Acharya at that time, and it focused on the importance of choosing to devote one's self to the teachings of Jesus, rather than to pursue meditation. A long-time participant of WA recollected the sermon as follows: "It felt like listening to a television kind of preacher, speaking about fire and hell and brimstone. He said we were lost. He told us that we'd go to hell if we don't come back to Christianity . . . and that, if we meditate, we'll go to hell. On and on . . . I think he felt disappointed that so many foreigners were coming to this ashram, he assumed we were from some Christian backgrounds but had ceased practising. He found it disappointing that he couldn't get through to most of us." And Dana, the leader of WA, reflected that "I don't think he could understand why anyone would be anything other than Christian." This sermon, which was the first of two, resulted in many individuals from WA refusing to turn up for the second sermon, and many individuals spent portions of the remainder of their retreat focused on processing and combatting the negative feelings that arose from being lectured to in this way. Reflecting on the way that the sermon was an immensely painful sore point for many WA participants, Dana told me, "I can understand why [the Acharya] gave that sermon. It's what he does as a pastor. He was trying to *save* people . . . people who he probably thinks are lost. Maybe he thought this was his only chance to save them. I get it." And present-day members of STA leadership, some of whom did not support the tone of the Acharya's sermons to WA, summarised the Acharya's actions with the following turn of phrase: "good heart but unwise action." But in spite of efforts from both sides to understand the other party, the phenomenon of one party attempting to correct the other had decisive consequences for the relational dynamics between WA and STA.

(4) Attempting to re-establish belonging: The fourth phase that we shall look at is the effort of WA to re-establish a sense of being and feeling welcomed at STA. Here, we will look specifically at the various measures that WA undertook in order to try to secure their ongoing welcome at STA; this played out in the form of WA leadership establishing specific rules for their group to follow when at STA (i.e. the rules were not deemed necessary at the other locations at which they held their retreats). Some of these rules, most of which had already been iterated to the WA participants in advance via email correspondence leading up to the retreat, included:

1 No use of any non-Christian religious images, including *malas* (beads often worn around the neck, and used in meditation practice), statues, or even T-shirts which have Hindu-styled insignia on them, etc. Retreat participants are told that if they do have any of these items, they should keep them inside their bags in their rooms until they depart from the ashram.

2 No physical contact between men and women. WA participants were told in a pre-retreat email, "we can feel and express connection with new and old friends in ways other than hugging. Please express your warmth to people of the other gender with a look, a *namaste* or a warm hello!"
3 During the evening time of meditative chanting, no singing of songs that could be thought of as "too Hindu."

These were rules that WA had imposed on itself in the context of STA alone. This self-imposition of rules by WA demonstrates the extent to which WA would restrict their actions and styles of behaviour rather than risk forfeiting their welcome at STA a second time. As Dana tersely said to the WA group during the introductory meeting at the retreat in April 2017, "and please follow them. The threat is real. We've already been kicked out."

Conclusion

What we see in the case of the contested middle between WA and STA is that, in spite of an initial invitation and a sense of unconditional welcome, the two parties struggled to maintain an ongoing sense of deep belonging. As I mentioned previously, the four stages of negotiating a sense of belonging that I have outlined here should not be interpreted as if they are linear processes which pass neatly from one discrete phase to another. At the same time, nor are they clearly cyclical. By this, I mean that, even though WA did indeed regain their invitation to STA, we note that the re-established welcome had a rather different existential feel to it than the initial welcome, in which a total and unencumbered freedom was felt by WA. Noting how this freshly experienced belonging which was experienced by WA was what we could understand as a "partial belonging," rather than the deep belonging originally experienced in their initial welcome. As such, belonging – in its two-fold nature as described previously – did not really occur, at least not consistently. Although the individuals were able to have a sense of togetherness (including, at times, participating in the spiritual community offered by STA) they were not able to experience the depth of belonging in which they felt that their entire selves – including especially the parts of their identities which did not seem to resonate with STA's Christian identity – were truly welcome.

Within the context of ongoing scholarly discussions of multiple religious belonging, this chapter has taken up the question of "belonging" in multiple religious contexts through considering the relational dynamics between STA and WA. By considering Feldmeier's and Diller's respective models for MRB and MRO side by side, we noted, highlighting Diller's work specifically, that belonging does not always occur in the lives of individuals who navigate two or more religious traditions; on the contrary, belonging is an ongoing process involving the decisions and attitudes of all parties involved; belonging necessitates a negotiation of sometimes complicated relational dynamics including the initial invitations, restrictions, corrections, and re-establishments of belonging. We also noted that WA, which occupies a unique place in the landscape of

STA as far as visiting groups are concerned due to the way in which they are the only visitors who are there for a spiritual purpose which is *not* explicitly Christian, navigates a form of "partial belonging." In this partial belonging, the whole-hearted vulnerability correlated with a sense of feeling fully accepted is left wanting. By documenting and exploring some of the ongoing relational dynamics between STA and WA from 2003 to present, I have provided original ethnographic material which demonstrates an important aspect of present-day life at STA; additionally, the ethnographic material also acts as a case study which provides us with real-life material through which we can reconsider and further nuance our understanding of multiple religious belonging. Through highlighting the relational dynamics between STA and WA, I have offered four phases of belonging and have also shown some of the microprocesses involved in negotiating existential belonging, thereby prompting us to reconsider some fundamental assumptions about belonging. Indeed, as this chapter has clearly demonstrated, much of the scholarship on multiple religious belonging takes as its starting point that belonging naturally occurs for those who wish it; our close-up examination of the tensions, negotiations, and resolutions between WA and STA have shown that belonging is an ongoing – and, at times, challenging – process for both sides.

Of course, not all experiences of multiple religious individuals will fit neatly into the model offered by considering the relational dynamics between STA and WA, which is particularly embedded with layers of power dynamics which the scope of this chapter has not allowed us to explore in further detail. Nonetheless, it remains a striking example of the relational dynamics between a community who sets itself up as being a space where *all* individuals can participate and belong and an individual (or group of individuals) who seeks to belong in that community but who struggles to feel fully welcomed into its midst. This raises some questions, such as: what would belonging look like for multiple religious individuals who participate in different religious contexts? Is there something unique to the *Christian* context of STA which caused WA to struggle to feel fully accepted?

On a somewhat different note, reflecting on the ethnographic example between STA and WA has caused me to also wonder whether true existential belonging readily occurs even outside of a "multiple religious" context. Deep belonging, in which all aspects of our identity can be brought into the community without fear of shame or unacceptance, is, no doubt, a difficult thing to experience. Perhaps, each of us must always selectively choose to bring certain facets of our (spiritual) identities to the foreground, while intentionally refraining from highlighting others, in order to experience deep acceptance? In other words, is the sheer difficulty of belonging that I have highlighted here a struggle which is exclusive to the multiple religious experience or is it part and parcel of the human experience – in which we all possess multiple diverse facets to our identity?

On still another note, I also wonder, reflecting again upon figures like Ramakrishna as explored by Long in this volume, whether all individuals who exist within a multitude of religious and spiritual circles are actively seeking the type

of belonging that I have been referring to throughout this chapter. I imagine it is very possible that, on the contrary, a number of multiple religious individuals have already found a deep belonging within themselves – and/or within God – and the question about *also* belonging to a community of individuals is not at the forefront of their spiritual concerns. This is not to say that this exploration has been in vain – on the contrary, there is no doubt that there are many multiple religious individuals who desperately wish to experience belonging within a variety of religious communities in the way that I have been exploring here. And yet, it seems equally likely that there is *also* room to explore a rather different type of belonging for multiple religious individuals – one in which individuals cultivate a sense of belonging within themselves (and/or within God) first and foremost. This other exploration would be grounded in a rather different understanding of belonging than the one I have narrowed in on here.[24]

In my experience, such thought-provoking questions readily arise from an interdisciplinary approach. I hope that this acrobatic back-bending of bridging philosophical theology with cultural anthropology has shed further light on the processes of belonging for multiple religious individuals *and* has shown the value that comes from tackling these questions from an interdisciplinary perspective. As we continue to explore the phenomenon of multiple religious orientation from a wide range of disciplinary and religious perspectives, I hope we can continue to challenge, prompt, and guide each other to formulate more nuanced questions. Perhaps, if we continue to stretch our understandings and thus learn to articulate and live out the necessary questions, we will – to invoke the words of Rilke[25] – without even realising it, find our way into the answers.

References

Brown, Brené. *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*. New York: Random House, 2017.

Cantorna, Amber. *Unashamed*. Louisville, Kentucky: WJK Books, 2019.

Diller, Jeanine. "Multiple Religious Orientation." *Open Theology* 2, no. 1 (2016): 338–53.

Feldmeier, Peter. "Perils and Possibilities of Multiple Religions Belonging: Test Case in Roman Catholicism." *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (2017): 73–89.

Heim, Mark. "Of Two Minds about a Theology without Walls." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51 (2016): 479–86.

Jones, E. Stanley. "E. Stanley Jones on the Ashram Ideal (1930)." In *History of Christianity in India: Source Materials*, edited by M.K. Kuriakose, 347–49, 4th ed. New Delhi, India: ISPCK, 2006.

Knitter, Paul. "Without Walls = Multiple Belonging?" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 51 (2016): 487–98.

24 see page 4 of the Introduction which outlines four different types of belonging explored in this volume.

25 Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*, Penguin Little Black Classics (London, England: Penguin Classics, 2016).

McEntee, Rory. "Interspiritual Theology as a Radical Potential for New Vistas in Theological Thought." *Open Theology* 2 (2016): 391–99.

———. "The Religious Quest as Transformative Journey: Interspiritual Religious Belonging and the Problem of Religious Depth." *Open Theology* 3, no. 1 (November 27, 2017): 613–29. https://doi.org/10.1515/opth-2017-0048.

Pohran, Nadya. "Belief-Inclusive Research: Does Strategically 'Bracketing Out' A Researcher's (Religious) Beliefs and Doubts Limit Access to Ethnographic Data?" *Current Anthropology* (forthcoming).

Rilke, Rainer Maria. *Letters to a Young Poet (Penguin Little Black Classics)*. London, England: Penguin Classics, 2016.

Vanier, Jean. *Community and Growth*, Rev. ed. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

Webster, Joseph. *The Anthropology of Protestantism: Faith and Crisis among Scottish Fishermen*. Contemporary Anthropology of Religion, 1st ed. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

Wilson, C. Roderick. "Seeing They See Not." In *Being Changed by Cross-Cultural Encounters: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience*, edited by David Earl Young and Jean Guy Goulet, 197–208. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994.

11 Inculturation, belonging, and defining "religion"

Some reflections on Sara Grant and the Christa Prema Seva Ashram[1]

Daniel Soars

> If we are to overcome our natural tendency, even in theological discussion, to fight to the death in defense of our own relative absolutes, we need to touch or be touched by the Absolute itself.[2]

Introduction

The aim of this volume is to interrogate the notion of "dual religious belonging" – specifically in and across Hinduism and Christianity. In this chapter, I want to suggest that the answer to the question of whether there is something *distinctive* about the Hindu-Christian case (as opposed to other combinations of traditions) has to be yes and no. On the one hand, interrogating the notion of dual belonging across *any* two traditions is likely to highlight some significant theological red lines which cannot be crossed (at least if adhering to a certain degree of orthodoxy and orthopraxy is considered to be an important criterion of belonging). In this sense, the Hindu-Christian case is not unusual. There are features of the beliefs and practices of each tradition taken separately which will constitute theological non-negotiables no matter which other tradition is being encountered. However, the particular dialectic between Hinduism and Christianity *is* different from other possible combinations, in that the meeting of *these* two traditions will put pressure on certain doctrines and practices in ways that are distinctive to the Hindu-Christian case. We will see that one of the areas of tension which arises concerns the importance of history to Christian and Hindu belonging.

Second, I argue that the very asking of a question about dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity risks perpetuating and reinforcing a particular way of viewing religious traditions as composed of invariant cores which is at least contestable, and may – in the specific historical case of Christianity and Hinduism – be

1 I am grateful to Gavin D'Costa and Bradley Malkovsky for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

2 Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 94–95.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-11

a continuation of a harmful power imbalance and Orientalist misrepresentation of Hinduism. In other words, interrogating the notion of dual belonging in these two traditions can be a useful way of bringing into explicit focus certain assumptions and hermeneutical blind spots which might otherwise remain implicit in our understandings of Hinduism and Christianity and might make us wary of discussing the notion of dual belonging in the first place.

Finally, I argue that the specific *kind* of dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity to which certain key figures (such as Henri Le Saux, Bede Griffiths, and Sara Grant)[3] have been drawn (namely, Christian Advaita) is one which resists the sorts of dualistic "either/or" (or even "both/and") conceptual frameworks upon which discussions of dual belonging seem to be premised. By way of context and illustration, I focus, in particular, on the life and the work of Sara Grant RSCJ (1922–2000) – a Roman Catholic nun whose Christian spirituality led her to feel increasingly at home in Hindu milieus.

Dual belonging in practice and theological red-lines: Sara Grant and the Christa Prema Seva ashram

In his editor's introduction to Grant's autobiography *Towards an Alternative Theology*,[4] Bradley Malkovsky notes that the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries saw a number of important works on Hinduism written by Christian scholars. At first, these were predominantly concerned with themes related to Indology and mission,[5] but the latter part of the twentieth century started to see an increasing turn towards Christian theological studies and spiritual reflections which were more genuinely comparative and open to the possible enrichment offered to Christianity by Hinduism. Particularly, since the 1960s (thanks in part, no doubt, to the ecclesiastical imprimatur and impetus provided by the positive approach to other religious traditions taken by Vatican II), Malkovsky identifies the emergence of a new literary genre among European Roman Catholic theologians who spent considerable periods of time in India – namely, a "blending of Christian theological reflection

3 I do not mean here to beg the question of dual belonging where these figures are concerned. Despite a recognition on their part of some significant Hindu and Christian doctrinal and experiential convergences, I do not think Bede Griffiths or Sara Grant explicitly claimed to be Hindu as well as Christian. In this chapter, I will explore the extent to which we might, with hindsight, describe Sara Grant as belonging to both traditions. Henri Le Saux/Abhishiktananda is perhaps the one of these three figures who would come closest to being "Christian-Hindu," but this can be followed up in more detail in Peter Tyler's chapter in this volume.

4 Originally published in 1991, *Towards* came out of the Teape Lectures which were delivered by Grant in 1989 at the University of Cambridge. Rev. William Marshall Teape (1882–1944) was a student of Bishop Westcott (1825–1901), who was one of the founders of the Cambridge Mission to India. Teape instituted a lecture series in Westcott's honour in 1955, and the "Teape" lectures continue to promote understanding of Hindu-Christian themes to this day.

5 One example would be J.N. Farquhar's, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London and Toronto: Humphrey Milford, 1913).

with first-hand experience of living Hinduism"[6] – and it is within this existential matrix that he situates Sara Grant, while suggesting, in fact, that her *Towards an Alternative Theology* is the twentieth century's last example of such a work.[7]

It is this "firsthand experience of living Hinduism," combined with "Christian theological reflection," which makes Grant such an interesting case study in dual belonging. She never uses the term "dual belonging" herself or reflects explicitly upon it, but she does seem to fit into the sort of working definition of dual belonging which we find in some of the contemporary literature. In his study of "hyphenated Christians," for example, Gideon Goosen suggests that dual belonging occurs "when a person has a first major religion and draws on a second to a greater or lesser degree, according to the three criteria of doctrine, practices, and actions."[8] As examples of individuals who fall under this heuristic umbrella in Hinduism and Christianity, he mentions Henri Le Saux/Swami Abhishiktananda (1910–1973), Bede Griffiths (1906–1993), and Raimon Panikkar (1918–2010). That Grant does not appear in this list reflects the fact that she is (undeservedly) lesser known, not that she does not belong there. Indeed, she manages to bring her theological reflections and her lived spirituality into a Hindu-Christian harmony and symbiotic synergy at least as skilfully as these other leading lights.[9] In this section of my essay, I will focus on Grant's "practices and actions" as a way of exploring the possibilities and the limits of religious belonging in Christian and Hindu universes.

I pick up Grant's story in 1972, when she helped to refound the ecumenical Christa Prema Seva Ashram in Pune (she moved to India in 1956, some 15 years after joining the novitiate of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart in Scotland). The ashram had originally been founded in 1927 by the Anglican priest, Fr Jack Winslow (who was a friend of Gandhi), "with a view to counteracting the long-standing and then still prevailing habit of Western missionaries of introducing their own [European] culture with the Gospel, and so contributing to the alienation of Indian Christians from their own sociocultural and spiritual inheritance."[10]

6 Malkovsky in Grant, *Towards*, ix.

7 The specific examples of works in this tradition that he mentions are: Klaus K. Klostermaier, *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban;* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1969); Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunachala: A Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1979); Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West: A Sequel to The Golden String* (London: Fount, 1983). Other important European Christian theologian-Indologists of Grant's generation that Malkovsky refers to (whose works are less autobiographical than those above) are Raimundo Panikkar (1918–2010), Richard De Smet, and Diana Eck (b. 1945).

8 Gideon Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2011), 19.

9 Martin Ganeri makes this case convincingly in his article "*Toward an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* – Sara Grant RSCJ's Contribution to Catholic Theological and Spiritual Encounter with Hinduism," accessed at http://publications.heythrop.ac.uk/1550/.

10 Grant, *Towards*, 64. Grant claims that Winslow's friendship with Gandhi had ". . . a profound influence on the ideas and life-style of the community" (*ibid*). Gandhi would even sometimes visit the CPS Ashram while in Pune.

This was, to be clear, a *Christian* ashram that was seeking an inculturated Indian form of *Christian* life and worship. Nevertheless, this first community was "*open to all that was not incompatible with the Gospel in Hinduism* and the other great religions of India, studying their scriptures and, as far as they could, incorporating Indian ways of worship."[11]

This first community came to an end in the 1960s and Christa Prema Seva was reopened in 1972 as a deliberately ecumenical ashram with Anglican, Catholic, and Evangelical members in the core community, as well as "a wise and spiritual elderly Hindu lady."[12] Grant went on to be the spiritual co-director (*ācārya*) from 1977 until 1992, and the ashram was adopted as a "little sister" by the Brahma Vidyā Mandir Ashram at Paunar, which had been founded by Vinoba Bhave to give women access to spiritual knowledge (*brahmavidyā*).

In the third of her Teape lectures, Grant paints a picture of what life was like at Christa Prema Seva. She points out that the Catholic Church in India was in the midst of liturgical renewal in 1972 – spurred on by Vatican II – and that the CPS ashram was one of the first "centres for experimentation."[13] In practice, this meant that they had a certain amount of freedom to use Indian ways of worship and even to use other scriptures in their liturgy. Their mandate was "to evolve a more Indian way [to celebrate] the Eucharist."[14] Thus, while the Gospel was the common basis and practical handbook of their community life, they also "read a passage from other scriptures every day that "resonated" with the biblical readings, but did this in a preparatory paraliturgy, as the Catholic bishops no longer allowed other scriptures to be read during the Liturgy of the Word."[15] In a similar vein, their lives centred on the daily celebration of the Eucharist, but they also had regular meditation, *arati*, and *satsangs* (during which they would reflect on Christian and Hindu texts, such as a Gospel, an Upaniṣad, the Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali, or the Gītā).[16] She tells us that the community "learnt from the start to listen with Hindu ears to the psalms and other readings from the Bible whenever our Hindu member was present."[17]

One possible response to these vignettes of community life at the Christa Prema Seva ashram would be to reject them as a red herring in a chapter on dual belonging and to argue that what we are really dealing with here is *inculturation*.[18] In his contribution to this volume, Gavin D'Costa, for example, avers that "the line between radical inculturation and dual belonging is thin but does exist." The

11 Ibid. (my emphasis).
12 Ibid.
13 Grant, *Towards*, 67.
14 Ibid. Grant points out that the Church of North India (a province of the worldwide Anglican Communion) gave them more freedom than the Catholic Church.
15 Grant, *Towards*, 67–68.
16 Ibid., 66.
17 Ibid., 65.
18 Goosen, for example, wants to distinguish dual belonging from inculturation – cf. *Hyphenated Christians*, 15.

whole notion of inculturation is a complex topic in its own right,[19] and I do not aim to deal with it fully here, but we might at least attempt to trace the thin line of demarcation to which D'Costa alludes. Inculturation is the process whereby Christianity (or another religious tradition) seeks to make itself meaningful in a traditionally non-Christian culture. This complex and delicate hermeneutical exercise in translation necessarily involves being aware of and sensitive towards the nuances and specificities of the language game which is being entered into. Just as people from "every nation" were able to hear the apostles speaking in their own distinctive language at Pentecost,[20] so the Church has always had to find ways to transmit the Good News in new and different idioms suitable to different sociocultural contexts. In his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Pope John Paul II describes the process as follows:

> Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.[21]

Inculturation involves change in two directions, then: both of the culture into which Christianity is entering and of Christianity itself in light of its effort at self-communication via translation. This seems to be a fairly apt way of understanding what was going on at the CPS ashram both before and during Grant's time there. By seeking to evolve "a more Indian way to celebrate the Eucharist," Christianity has the potential to transform India (or, more modestly, the Christa Prema Seva ashram had the potential to transform its locales in Pune) by representing and giving thanks for Christ's redemptive death and resurrection in ways which were meaningful *in that context*. At the same time, the Indian context has the potential to transform the celebration of the Eucharist – in terms of both "practice" (e.g. including Hindu sacred texts and symbols in the liturgy, sitting on the floor rather than on benches, or allowing for periods of meditation as well as more formal prayer) and understanding (by learning to listen to the meaning of the Eucharist "with Hindu ears"). This need for Christian adaptation is confirmed by *Redemptoris Missio*:

> Missionaries, who come from other churches and countries, must immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations. Hence, they must learn the language

19 See A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006); G. D'Costa, "Inculturation: India and Other Religions," *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 121-48.

20 Acts 2:5–12.

21 *Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate* (7 December 1990), Ch.5, §52. Abbreviated hereafter to *RM*. www.vatican.va.

> of the place in which they work, become familiar with the most important expressions of the local culture, and discover its values through direct experience.[22]

Again, this would certainly be an appropriate description of Sara Grant, as well as of other twentieth-century Christians in India like Henri Le Saux and Bede Griffiths, and – of course – of plenty of missionaries who came before them.

The "difficult process" and "slow journey"[23] of inculturation come across vividly in Grant's record of her particular struggles with how to celebrate Holy Week in the ashram. The problem of how to find a common basis or "universe of discourse"[24] for this high point of the Christian year was made more acute, she says, by the fact that biblical tradition and Christian faith are rooted in history – thus the creedal confession of belief in Jesus, son of Mary, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate – and that this historical character is essential to Christian identity in a way which it is not to Hinduism (which, she argues, is more concerned with timeless myth and symbol). The breakthrough in (dis)solving this problem came at their Easter Vigil in 1988, when Grant's Christian understanding of Christ and history was transformed, recast, and rearticulated by what she had learnt from Hinduism:

> Suddenly we realised that until his death, Jesus was bound by history and its limitations, but through his death and resurrection he had burst the bonds of space and time and could be recognized as not only Lord and Christ, but *Satpurusha*, the archetypal Man of Vedic tradition, in whom every member of the human race can recognize the truth of his or her own being.[25]

This 1988 Vigil was "epoch-making" because the insight (previously mentioned) settled the "universe of discourse" problem by showing how to make the Christian understanding of Christ as God, the transhistorical Logos, intelligible in a Hindu context (i.e. the universe is born of self-sacrificing love – in Christ (cf. John 1:1–4 or Revelation 13:8) and in the Purusha of the *Ṛig Veda*).[26] Readings at this "splendid trans-and-supra-cultural celebration"[27] were taken from the New Testament and the Kaṭha Upaniṣad, and throughout the Vigil, they had a "small, very beautiful image of the Naṭarāja at the base of the great Paschal lamp – "for it seemed to us that this man [Jesus Christ] could indeed be called 'Lord of the Dance,' for in

22 *RM*., §53.
23 *RM*., §52.
24 Grant, *Towards*, 68.
25 Ibid., 72.
26 Ibid., 74. Cf. also 75–6. Christ is "the Man who is born on earth as the historical expression of the *Satpurusha*, reliving in his own person, in a specific historical context, the mystery of the life-giving death of the *Purusha*. In so doing, he offers to the whole human race a visible clue to the meaning of the human condition . . . the self must die that the Self may live in all."
27 Grant, *Towards*, 72.

his own life, death, and resurrection, he visibly personifies the hidden rhythm of the Creator Spirit."[28] Sara Grant and her community thus sought to carry out the task described by Pope Paul VI as

> assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language. . . . And the word "language" should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological or cultural.[29]

This is certainly inculturation, then, but can it also be described as "dual religious belonging"? One reason we might want to maintain a distinction between these two concepts is because of the accent in the former on culture and anthropology. We might think that it is one thing for Christianity to adapt itself to certain cultural or anthropological conditions (e.g. sitting cross-legged on the floor rather than standing in a pew) and quite another for it to assimilate properly religious features of that culture. In other words, we might want to claim that this is not really dual *religious* belonging. The objections to such a distinction are, however, easy to anticipate. It is far from obvious that culture can be neatly separated from religion (not least, we might think, in the case of Hinduism). We do not even need to get into this debate, though, to see that Sara Grant and the CPS ashram clearly *were* allowing their Christian practices to be shaped, understood, and influenced – at least to some extent – by the *religious* thought worlds of their Hindu contexts.

If the thin line between inculturation and dual belonging to which D'Costa and others have referred is not easy to find in the distinction between culture and religion, perhaps it may yet be found in the distinction between the sort of "assimilation and transposition" talked about by Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the notion of genuine "belonging" which we are seeking to explore. In other words, we might want to object that the experimental liturgies at Christa Prema Seva do not allow us to infer dual religious *belonging*. This objection seems more plausible when we review Grant's descriptions of the ashram. We have already seen that the Gospel set the pattern for community life and that each day centred around a celebration of the Eucharist.[30] On top of this, the "guru" of the ashram was the risen Christ (as reflected in its name). A poster at the entrance summarised the community's self-understanding as follows: "A central concern of the

28 Ibid., 77.

29 Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975), 63: *loc. cit*., 53.

30 In a personal note, Bradley Malkovsky (who spent time at the CPS Ashram) told me that certain Hindus, after Grant had sought out the permission of the local bishop, were allowed to receive communion at the Eucharist celebrated at the Ashram. They had a general conviction about the special presence of God/Christ at communion and requested to be able to receive but did not show interest in actually becoming Christians themselves, for various reasons. For this, and for an interesting discussion about *prasād* in Hinduism versus Holy Communion in Catholicism, see Bradley Malkovsky, *God's Other Children* (Harper One, 2013) (E-book), Ch.6 "Crossover Communion."

community is to reflect on and enter more deeply into the mystery of the relation of Christ to the Self-communication of God in and through the other great spiritual traditions of the world."[31]

In short, we might want to say that this is a case of a community rooted in and belonging to Christianity, which seeks to understand its faith in the light of other religious traditions (specifically, in this case, in the light of Hinduism) – and not a case of *dual religious belonging*. Thus, *Redemptoris Missio* warns that inculturation "must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith"[32] and that inculturation must be guided by two principles: compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church. Whether or not these two principles are likely to prevent a Christian from fully belonging to another religious tradition (cf. the way Grant says that passages from Hindu scriptures were only read in preparatory para-liturgies because they were not allowed to include them along with the Christian scriptures in the Liturgy of the Word) could only really be settled on a case-by-case basis to see whether or not particular beliefs and practices from Hinduism are compatible with the Gospel, but it is worth remembering that, as Goosen points out (and he is surely correct), belonging admits of degrees.[33] The fact that there are certain theological "red lines" which a Christian cannot cross does not mean that it is *a priori* impossible to belong – to some extent – to another religious tradition as well as to Christianity. In fact, in an interesting twist of historical coincidence, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian meditation in 1989 – the year after Grant's watershed celebration of the Easter Vigil.[34] The Letter concerns renewed interest among some Christians in "forms of meditation associated with some eastern religions and their particular methods of prayer" and reaffirms the relationship between Revelation, the Church, and Christian prayer.[35] The Letter is clear that different methods of prayer should *not* be rejected out of hand simply because they are not Christian[36] and advocates learning from them – "so long as the Christian conception of prayer, its logic and requirements are never obscured."[37] It does *not* say that proposals "to harmonize Christian meditation with eastern techniques"[38] (such as we can imagine taking place in the CPS ashram) should be ruled out but declares that they "need to have their contents and

31 Grant, *Towards*, 65.

32 *RM*, §52. Of course, this is *the* question at stake in discussions about dual belonging – just what *does* constitute the "distinctiveness and integrity" of the Christian (or Hindu) faith?

33 Goosen, *Hyphenated Christians*, 19.

34 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of Christian Meditation*, 15 October 1989.

35 Ibid., §1–6.

36 Ibid., §16.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., §12.

methods ever subjected to a thorough-going examination so as to avoid the danger of falling into syncretism."[39] Again, while being careful to warn that any attempt "to fuse Christian meditation with that which is non-Christian . . . is not free from dangers and errors," it is interesting that the Letter makes no attempt to proscribe such a fusing altogether (though it does rule out certain beliefs and practices as heretical).[40]

It seems to me, then, that there is no obvious reason to conclude that Grant's descriptions of community life at the Christa Prema Seva ashram constitute inculturation (though they certainly *do* constitute this) and *not* belonging. Christianity is clearly setting the possibilities and the parameters for belonging to Hinduism in this case (which is the crucial measure of orthodoxy underpinning the CDF logic in the aforementioned Letter), rather than the other way around, but the fact that Grant was willing to allow *Hindu* practices and beliefs to influence her way of belonging to *Christianity* surely suggests a measure of genuine belonging to this other religious tradition as well. Perhaps, the difference between inculturation and belonging is ultimately one of degree: just *how much* is the influence of the other religion allowed to affect one's "home" tradition? Clearly, "drawing from," "respecting," and "admiring" are not the same as "belonging," but the fact that Grant came to a new understanding of such a central element of Christianity – namely, Christ's identity and resurrection – thanks to her immersion in Hinduism, indicates a level of epistemic and spiritual openness that is surely compatible with belonging. There are undoubtedly areas of tension (such as that already mentioned by Grant, of the extent to which embeddedness in particular historical events is crucial to Christian or Hindu belonging), and it is likely to be these areas which will make some Christians (who are less willing than Grant to travel along Christian paths in directions towards which Hinduism might be pointing) suspicious of Hindu-Christian dual belonging.[41] These are also likely to be the areas of Christian doctrine and practice, however, which the specific encounters

39 Ibid.

40 Bede Griffiths was critical of what he saw as the Letter's shallow understanding of Asian spirituality. "Eastern meditation," he wrote, "is treated as if it were a matter of superficial techniques, of 'bits and pieces' a Christian can use if he wishes, but of whose dangers and abuses he must be made aware. What is still more disappointing is that the conception of Christian prayer it presents is most inadequate, ignoring as it does what is deepest and most significant in the gospel and in Catholic tradition." Bede Griffiths, "Vatican Letter Disguises Wisdom of East Religions," *National Catholic Reporter*, 11 May 1990.

41 At the other end of the spectrum, there will also be those who would argue that what finally makes a Christian a Christian is a personal relationship with Christ and that need not include all the so-called non-negotiable Christian doctrines with which we are familiar. As Malkovsky notes, "[t]here are many Hindus who see themselves as disciples of Christ, which means that they strive to abide by his Gospel values of compassion to all and by the recognition that all people have equality and dignity before God. And so, while they are followers of Christ and live his *values*, they cannot identify with all Christian *doctrine*." *God's Other Children*, 64. There is ultimately no simple answer to whether this constitutes genuine Hindu-Christian dual belonging because dual religious belonging and its doctrinal implications will be understood differently by different Christians (and Hindus).

of Hinduism and Christianity have the potential to revivify and transform – and it is only because of the work of rare pioneering figures like Grant, who are able to belong to and indwell the liminal "in between," that such revivification and transformation is possible.

Dual belonging in theory and hermeneutical blind spots

In this next section, I want to pursue the issue of what constitutes "belonging" by making explicit some of the motivations which might be behind our asking of the question in the first place. In one of the first systematic studies of the concept of multiple religious belonging, Catherine Cornille posed the interesting question of whether "Western religiosity is not merely becoming more 'Oriental' in nature."[42] She points out that belonging to two different faith traditions has been a common experience in the religious histories of China and Japan, and that, as a general characterisation of human spirituality, "multiple religious belonging may have been the rule rather than the exception, at least on a popular level."[43] Indeed, early followers of Christ saw no problem in being simultaneously both Jewish and Christian (Acts 2:46), and generations of Christian missionaries have helped to foster (somewhat ironically) complex varieties of dual religious belonging by bringing the Gospel into contact with indigenous belief systems. One thinks, for example, of the Aboriginal children who "might have prayed to Jesus daily, but at night . . . feared spirits that dwelled in the fertile Noongar country outside the dormitory windows."[44]

The growth of the phenomenon of dual religious belonging in Western societies as a result of a combination of factors (such as increased migration, travel, and globalisation) is certainly interesting from a sociological perspective, but is there anything particularly remarkable or noteworthy from a theological point of view about the phenomenon as such? If it has been a commonplace in many other parts of the world throughout history, why bother to draw special attention to it?

I want to suggest that one of the assumptions lurking behind questions about dual religious belonging relates to a particular way of understanding what a religious tradition actually is. Rather like a nation state, a religion can be conceived of as an entity with a specific history and defined borders. Belonging is not simply a case of where an individual *feels* that they belong but also requires some sort of official recognition to validate that person's subjective sense of identity.[45] I am not sure I want to argue *that* – so much as to ask *whether* – a concern with the possibilities and the parameters of dual religious belonging might be motivated by

42 Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 2. First edition published with Orbis in 2002.

43 Ibid., 1–2.

44 Stephen Kinnane, *Shadow Lines* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003), 82.

45 Raimon Panikkar develops this subjective/objective character of belonging in his chapter in Cornille's, *Many Mansions*. See Panikkar, *On Christian Identity: Who Is a Christian?* 121–44.

an overemphasis on the objective element of such belonging – defined, in the religious case, by the borders of orthodoxy and orthopraxy as guarded by individuals and institutions who have an interest in maintaining them. Just as nations are fiercely protective of their sovereign identity – both when outside actors attempt to transgress their geographical frontiers and when elements from within are seen as subversive threats to the accepted sense of what that nation stands for – so too religious traditions can become protective of their own doctrinal and doxastic borderlands. Hence, we invent the concept of "dual religious belonging" or of "dual citizenship" to hold the two nations or religions apart. That is to say that the concepts themselves imply that – while it is *possible* – belonging in these cases involves a sort of bifurcation or dichotomy, rather than a harmonious blending together. After all, we can also think of other spheres of belonging which are not considered exclusive and which we quite happily allow to overlap: it is possible to feel a sense of belonging to more than one culture (e.g. if we have mixed parentage or if we are born in one country but become naturalised in another), community (e.g. a parish and a workplace), or even family (e.g. belonging to one's own birth family and the family one marries into) – but in none of these cases do we typically speak of "dual" belonging. Indeed, a bibliographical search for "dual belonging" produces results concerned almost entirely with religion or citizenship,[46] and nothing else (even though these are obviously not the only two contexts in which a person can "belong").

My suggestion is that asking questions about dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity is based on – and risks perpetuating and reinforcing – a way of viewing religious traditions (as akin to nation states) that has come under increasing suspicion in postmodern and postcolonial discourses which tend to question the very notion of impermeable religious boundaries and the existence of distinctly bounded religious identities.[47] The whole idea of an easily definable and essentialised "religious tradition" (with "objective" features like sacred texts and historical founders, as well as borders shaped by doctrine and practice) is seen by these postcolonial critiques as a Western and colonial construct that does not reflect the realities of religious life and history.[48] In his work on early Christianity and its gradual separation from Judaism, for example, Daniel Boyarin points to ways in which the formation of religious identities often involves the creation of false dichotomies between self and other (just as the formation and maintenance of national identities can involve superimposing borders on pieces of paper which partly generate or reinforce a false sense of separation between the people who end up on either

46 Or even both together, as in the volume edited by M. Girma and C. Romocea, *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?* (London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2017).

47 My thoughts in what follows have been influenced by Catherine Cornille's analysis of similar critiques of the discipline of comparative theology. See C. Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020), 65–69.

48 See, for example, T. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

side of them).[49] This dismantling of the notion of uniform and stable religious identities is also evident in feminist theological critiques of religion. Jeannine Hill Fletcher, for instance, emphasises that "there is no 'Christian' identity, only Christian identities implicated by race, gender, class, ethnicity, profession, and so on."[50] Hill Fletcher focuses instead on concrete experiences that can generate empathy and understanding between individuals from different traditions (e.g. childbirth and breastfeeding). We might think of Grant's Hindu-Christian celebration of the Easter Vigil as an example of such a concrete experience. In short,

> Rather than focusing on institutional questions of religious identity and belonging or doctrinal questions of truth, postcolonial theology thus takes seriously the reality of hybrid religious identities as resource for theological reflection. . . . Any conception of religions as bounded realities engaging one another from within distinct and more or less stable frames of reference is regarded as hegemonic and apologetic.[51]

Ironically, therefore, discussing dual religious belonging as a concept or even positively encouraging the crossing of religious boundaries and the cultivation of hybrid identities might "ultimately serve only to reestablish and reinforce the idea of undebatable religious identities and untransgressable borders between religions."[52] We might want to ask ourselves whether the notion of dual religious belonging reinforces a politics of essentialism. Does it enforce or even create particular markers of identity by the very process of juxtaposing or opposing them to those of other traditions?

These hermeneutical blind spots are of relevance to the Hindu-Christian case because they reveal a questionable (at best) or even harmful (at worst) way of (mis)understanding both traditions. The risk is in imagining that there is some essence of Christianity or Hinduism freely floating beyond cultural and philosophical frameworks to which one must belong. As Claude Geffré puts it in his chapter in Cornille's *Many Mansions*: "It is always a matter of a Christianity already inculturated, and this since the beginning of the history of the church. An abstract Christianity does not exist."[53] Again, if early Christians managed simultaneously to belong to Judaism and to be followers of Christ, it is surely at least

49 D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

50 J. Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 88.

51 Cornille, *Meaning and Method*, 67.

52 J. Gruber, "(Un)Silencing Hybridity: A Postcolonial Critique of Comparative Theology," in *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom*, ed. M. Brecht and R. Locklin (New York: Routledge, 2016), 28.

53 C. Geffré, "Double Belonging and the Originality of Christianity as a Religion," in *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 93–105 (here, 95–96).

possible to imagine that someone (like Sara Grant) could belong simultaneously to Hinduism and to Christianity. Nor will it do, as I argued previously, to clinically separate out cultural from the religious in discussing the motif of religious belonging. In Geffré's words:

> How could one speak of African or especially Asian culture without taking account of its religious roots? The importance of this question for the problem of double belonging is clear. . . . We are familiar enough with the official discourses proclaiming a plural identity simultaneously both fully Christian and wholly Indian. . . . But what would the Indian identity consist of outside of Hinduism?[54]

While we might want to be cautious of equating Indian identity with Hinduism wholesale, Geffré is surely right that the two are intertwined – such that it would be difficult to conceive of a fully *inculturated* "Indian Christianity" without some measure of *dual religious belonging* to the thought-worlds, imageries, and practices of Hinduism – as we saw in the examples described by Grant.

With regard to Christianity, one lesson we can draw from the postcolonial critique of religion for our understanding of dual belonging is that the coexistence of elements from diverse religious traditions and diverse cultures is likely to be seen as a threat (or even as a conceptual challenge) only if one views a religion as a more or less fixed and unchanging entity in the first place. A more dynamic understanding of religious traditions, sensitive to the specific contexts, origins, and genealogies of particular beliefs and practices, along with a certain hermeneutical flexibility and spiritual openness,[55] may lead us to see dual belonging simply as an especially concentrated example of a dialogical process which has always been integral to the development and growth of religious traditions. Of course, some elements of Hinduism and Christianity may be genuinely incompatible, but the example of figures like Grant, Griffiths, Le Saux, Panikkar, and others indicate that some measure of dual belonging to these two traditions is possible.[56]

With regard to Hinduism, this postmodern and postcolonial critique is perhaps even more pertinent because a number of scholars have argued that "Hinduism" itself is a (British) colonial construction.[57] The suggestion is that the designation

54 Ibid., 96.

55 The sort of openness we see in the *Letter on Christian Meditation*.

56 Talking of straightforward dual belonging for any of these individuals is, of course, fraught with difficulty. In their contributions to this volume, Peter Tyler and Michael Barnes SJ tease out the complexities in the specific cases of Le Saux and Panikkar. As is well known, Abhishiktananda was tormented during his time in India by the fact that he could not conceptually reconcile Hindu Advaita and Christian experiences of ultimate reality. He only re/dissolved this tension near the end of his life through a mystical near-death experience.

57 For example, Vasudha Dalmia, Robert Fryckenberg, John Hawley, Brian Smith, Heinrich von Stietencron, and others. See J.E. Llewellyn, ed., *Defining Hinduism: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

"Hinduism" has been artificially constructed and misleadingly applied (by Western scholars who have studied India and by certain Hindus themselves) to a wide variety of hitherto discrete traditions and practices. The result is that Hinduism came to be thought of (and still is thought of in the Western and Christian popular imaginary) as a religious system akin to Protestant Christianity with certain founding figures, sacred texts, doctrinal orthodoxies, and common rituals.[58] Even if this particular Orientalist genealogy of Hinduism is probably slightly excessive, it does caution us against simplistic and unhelpful ways of understanding Hinduism (and, indeed, Christianity). To return to my earlier analogy, the situation might be compared to the ways in which many nation-states in Africa and the Middle East were "invented" during the colonial and post-war periods – it is not that the countries and their peoples did not exist, but that the concept of a single entity called "Iraq" or "Nigeria" is itself an artificial construct which may not be recognised by many of the discrete ethnic groups it is supposed to unite. Just as it could be misleading or confusing to ask whether someone can be both a Sunni Muslim and an Iraqi (since it assumes that they accept the latter as a recognisable identity in the first place), so it might be misplaced to ask whether someone can belong both to Christianity and to "Hinduism."

On top of this, early Indological scholarship tended to view "Hinduism" as a lamentable degeneration from the rarefied heights of Brahmanism, which was seen as a primordial, "higher" form of the religion.[59] Western scholars like Paul Deussen and Friedrich Max Müller helped to create and cement the view that Brahmanism consisted of six philosophical systems, of which Vedānta was preeminent, and that, of all the different schools of Vedānta, *advaita* was the most important – not least because of its consolidation by Śaṁkara, India's "greatest philosopher." "Popular" Hinduism as the religion of the laity rather than of the socio-religious elites (i.e. in *contrast* to Brahmanism) was seen as emphasising worship (*pūjā*) of images of a particular god and devotion (*bhakti*) to that god (usually either Vishnu or Shiva, or one of their many avatars) as the means of liberation, instead of knowledge (*jñāna*) of the transpersonal (*nirguṇa*) Brahman. This way of configuring "Hinduism" as having a "double essence" – of Aryan monotheism and Dravidian polytheism – was also seized upon by certain nineteenth-century "neo-Hindus." Reformers like Rammohan Roy and Swami Vivekananda, and later twentieth-century figures like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, were happy to endorse the picture painted by Western scholars such as Deussen and Müller that tended to equate "real" Hinduism with (Advaita) Vedānta. While this

58 For more detailed discussions of this complex area, see, for example: Vasudha Dalmia and Heinrich von Stietencron, *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995); Hermann Kulke and Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, eds., *Hinduism Reconsidered* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001); Brian K. Pennington, *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

59 Two of the most influential studies of Brahmanic Hinduism around this time were Paul Deussen's, *The System of Vedānta* (1883) and F. Max Müller's, *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (1899).

highly philosophical Sanskritic Hinduism may not (ever?) have been representative of the diverse forms of belief and worship of the majority of Indians, "it was made to define a whole range of heterogenous practices that were then lumped together to constitute a single religious tradition termed 'Hinduism'."[60]

The questioning of what exactly "Hinduism" is and who exactly speaks for "Hinduism" continues to be provoked by more recent phenomena such as the rise of political parties in India on platforms of Hindu religious nationalism; feminist scholarship on Hinduism and patriarchy; and the growing voice of self-assertive "ex-untouchable" Dalit groups (which undermine any exclusive claims of the Brahmin castes to "represent" Hinduism). All of this should make us at least alert to the dangers of discussing dual belonging in "Christianity" and "Hinduism" – particularly when Christians have played a role in establishing certain Western understandings of "Hinduism" in the first place. Of course, the contributors to this volume are well aware of these hermeneutical complexities and do not naively understand or speak of either Christianity or Hinduism as monolithic, timeless essences detached from particular social and historical contexts. That being said, the fact that the majority of the chapters are written from a Christian perspective (either that of the author or the examples which are discussed) perhaps suggests that the question of dual religious belonging is more of a Christian preoccupation than a Hindu one,[61] and the fact that several of the chapters focus specifically on (Advaita) Vedāntic Hinduism[62] in particular may betray the unconscious continuation of a partial view of what Hinduism actually is (or, at least, indicate that Christians have been most likely to belong in some measure to (Advaita) Vedāntic universes rather than to more localised devotional strands of Hinduism).

Christian Advaita and non-dual belonging: some concluding thoughts

In this chapter, I have explored some of the possible reasons for asking a question about dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity in the first place. Though the rise of this phenomenon in the West is certainly a matter of sociological interest, it is not necessarily obvious why we should be concerned about it from a theological and philosophical point of view. In the first half of my essay, I used Sara Grant's descriptions of community life at Christa Prema Seva ashram to suggest that

60 Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25.

61 This claim would obviously need much more historical, empirical, and theological justification. It might simply be a coincidence or reflect the fact that the conference out of which this volume grew was organised by Western academics at a Western university.

62 As well as Reid B. Locklin's chapter on Advaita Vedānta, I am also thinking of those that look at Abhishiktananda, Panikkar, and my own focus on Grant. Notwithstanding the twenty-first-century postcolonial ambivalence towards the elite historical connotations of Vedānta and the increasing recognition among Indian Christians of Dalit groups, this sort of RC Christian engagement with Vedāntic Hinduism continues today in the work of figures like Francis Clooney, Martin Ganeri, and Bradley Malkovsky.

there is a difference between inculturation and dual belonging, but that belonging admits of degrees. The ways in which Grant allowed Hindu scriptures, icons, and beliefs to influence her own practice and understanding of the Christian Eucharist (and Easter Vigil in particular) suggest some measure of genuine belonging to Hinduism. There are, of course, theological red lines in any religion, and working out just where these lines lie in encounters between Christianity and Hinduism has been – and will continue to be – central to dialogue and comparative theology between these two traditions. Indeed, there may be certain beliefs and practices which resist attempts at harmony or synthesis and which point to incompatibilities that will limit the parameters of Hindu-Christian dual belonging. It is, I think, an assumed incompatibility – in terms of doctrine, praxis, and spirituality – between different religious traditions which leads us to pose the question of "dual belonging" at all. In the second section of my essay, I suggested that the very notion of dual belonging betrays a particular way of understanding religious traditions as boundaried and distinct, and thus enumerable, entities. Postcolonial critiques, especially, have sought to uncover the political locations of the construction of such a configuration and force us to be more alert to the historical, contextual, and internally diverse complexities of all religious traditions. This is a critique which is particularly pertinent to the case of "Hinduism" and not least when discussed by Christians.

In closing, I would like to try to imagine how Grant herself might have responded to a book like this one. First and foremost, I think she would be delighted that it opens up conversations about how Hinduism can enrich and challenge Christianity. She was convinced that Christians had much to learn from Hinduism – for example, about how to resist a false dichotomy between nature and grace,[63] about how to think of salvation,[64] and about how to understand what it means to believe in Jesus as the Way to God.[65] Second, I think she would see this volume as an example of what (Christian) theology should be – namely, "reflection on experience in the light of faith."[66] She saw theology as a process of discernment in the Vedāntic Hindu (*viveka*) and Ignatian Christian (consolation/desolation) senses of that term, and so, I think she would also remind us to pay attention to the inner movements of our heart, as well as our reason, as we read and reflect on these pages. When pondering the possibilities of dual belonging in Hinduism and Christianity, we would do well to remember the importance of "a peaceful sense of consonance with the habitual leading of God in one's life as indications of the true path, rather than intellectual weighing of pros and cons (though this too has its place)."[67] Third, I think she would encourage us to extend this conversation about dual belonging beyond the narrow ambit of academic experts.

63 Grant, *Towards*, 78.
64 Ibid., 86.
65 Ibid., 86 and 90.
66 Ibid., 59.
67 Ibid., 59–60.

The consolations and the desolations of believers in "living and frequent" contact with "the changing realities of the human condition" could be valuable pointers to areas of doctrine in which development and modification are needed.[68] As the Vatican Fathers affirmed, "there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and words which have been handed down. This happens through the *contemplation and study of believers who treasure these things in their hearts* (cf. Lk 2:19, 51) . . . [and] through the *intimate understanding of spiritual things they experience*" as well as through Magisterial teaching.[69] The increasing phenomenon of dual belonging – opened up by growth in knowledge of other religious traditions and of contact between people of different beliefs – is surely fertile ground for such reflection on experience in the light of faith in order "to come to a deeper penetration into the mystery of Christ."

Finally, if we were to ask Sara Grant whether she considered herself to be a Hindu-Christian dual belonger, I think she would resist the question. The non-dual (*advaita*) form of Hinduism to which Grant was attracted helped her to understand more deeply and articulate more clearly what she saw also as the fundamental non-dualism at the heart of Christianity – namely, that the world can only be understood in relation to God, in whom we live and move and have our being.[70] This dynamic vision of the human person does not negate religious belonging, but it does not stop at that level either. As Grant puts it: "It is the peculiar gift of advaita to reconcile different points of view, not by cancelling out one or the other, but by transcending both in a fuller synthesis."[71] While Grant would, therefore, welcome a discussion of Hindu-Christian dual belonging, for some of the reasons I have enumerated previously, I am sure she would be reluctant to devise yet another model for theologising, since the very essence of a non-dualistic Christianity or Hinduism is to point beyond such conceptual systems.[72]

References

Abhishiktananda, Swami. *The Secret of Arunachala: A Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain*. New Delhi: ISPCK, 1979.

Boyarin, Daniel. *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

Brecht, Mara, and Reid Locklin, eds. *Comparative Theology in the Millennial Classroom*. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of Christian Meditation* (Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), October 15, 1989.

68 Ibid., 61.

69 Ibid., 60, citing *Dei verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 1965 (Grant's emphasis).

70 Acts 17:28.

71 Grant, *Towards*, 94.

72 Ibid.

Cornille, Catherine, ed. *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010.

———. *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*. Hoboken: Wiley, 2020.

Dalmia, Vasudha, and Heinrich von Stietencron. *Representing Hinduism: The Construction of Religious Traditions and National Identity*. New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995.

D'Costa, Gavin. "Inculturation: India and Other Religions." *Studia Missionalia* 44 (1995): 121-48.

Dei verbum, the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, 1965.

Evangelii Nuntiandi (Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation), 1975.

Ganeri, Martin. "Toward an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian – Sara Grant RSCJ's Contribution to Catholic Theological and Spiritual Encounter with Hinduism." *New Blackfriars* (Forthcoming). http://publications.heythrop.ac.uk/1550/.

Girma, Mohammed, and Cristian Romocea. *Christian Citizenship in the Middle East: Divided Allegiance or Dual Belonging?* London and Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley, 2017.

Goosen, Gideon. *Hyphenated Christians: Towards a Better Understanding of Dual Religious Belonging*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.

Grant, Sara. *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002.

Griffiths, Bede. *The Marriage of East and West: A Sequel to The Golden String*. London: Fount, 1983.

———. "Vatican Letter Disguises Wisdom of East Religions." *National Catholic Reporter*, May 11, 1990.

Hill Fletcher, Jeannine. *Monopoly on Salvation? A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Kinnane, Stephen. *Shadow Lines*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2003.

Klostermaier, Klaus K. *Hindu and Christian in Vrindaban;* London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1969.

Kulke, Hermann, and Gunther-Dietz Sontheimer, eds. *Hinduism Reconsidered*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2001.

Llewellyn, J.E., ed. *Defining Hinduism: A Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Malkovsky, Bradley. *God's Other Children*. Harper One, 2013 (E-book).

Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Pennington, Brian K. *Was Hinduism Invented? Britons, Indians, and the Colonial Construction of Religion*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Redemptoris Missio: On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate. Pope John Paul II, 1990. www.vatican.va.

Shorter, Aylward. *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006.

12 Christian Sannyāsa

Dual belonging or a bridge too far?

Peter Tyler

The nature of Sannyāsa

The Sanskrit term *saṃnyāsa* is comprised of two elements: *saṃ*, total or complete, and *nyās*, renunciation or abandonment.[1] In early Sanskrit texts such as the *Upaniṣads* and the *Manusmṛti* it is seen as the final *āśrama* or stage of human life which is traditionally seen as lasting 100 years and divided into four stages of 25 years each: *brahmacarya* (the initial period of discipline and studentship), *gṛhastha* (the householder stage), *vānaprastha* (loosening of bonds from the householder stage and preparation for old age), and finally *sannyāsa* – the absolute renunciation. As understood in the *Manusmṛti* and most early texts, these phases were usually limited to certain castes and often only men.[2] Thus, from its very beginnings, the term raises a problem that we shall return to throughout this chapter: how far must it be understood solely in its original Indian context and how much can it be adapted for contemporary seekers, especially for those from beyond the traditional Hindu folds such as Christians. In this respect, it thus acts as a "test case" of dual belonging and we shall explore here how far such an ascetical dual belonging can be achieved, if at all.

In its early context, *sannyāsa* is understood as a state that is only achieved after the first three stages have been completed: one must have undergone student formation and discipline according to Vedic principles, raised a family and lived the life of a householder performing necessary duties as a good citizen to benefit society and then undergone the period of withdrawal as a "forest dweller"

1 A classic exposition of the *āśrama* system, its origins and forms can be found in P. Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). For more on the origins and meaning of the term *saṃnyāsa*, I refer to T. Kochumuttom, *Christian Life Amidst Many Religions* (Bengaluru: Dharmaram, 2015); J. Rajan, *Bede Griffiths and Sannyāsa* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997); P. Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality: A Search into the Christian Ashram Movement Against Its Hindu Background* (Indore: Satprakashan, 1997); M. Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2012). I have also drawn on personal conversations referenced throughout the chapter. In common with standard English works on the subject, I have chosen to use the term *sannyāsa* rather than *saṃnyāsa*. Some of the material in this chapter appeared in an earlier article in *Studies in Spirituality,* Vol. 27, 2017.

2 See A. Thottakara, "*Sannyāsa*: Dynamics of a Life of Renunciation," in *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living*, ed. S. Chackalackal (Bengaluru: Vidyavanam, 2009), 560.

DOI: 10.4324/9781003142591-12

on the outskirts of the village, assisted by members of one's family, before the final total renunciation of *sannyāsa* is possible.[3] Yet another debate arises in the Indian sources – is *sannyāsa* a fourth *āśrama* or stage of life or is it rather beyond all *āśramas*? This latter view has usually been the attitude to *sannyāsa* taken by the Christian ascetics with whom I have discussed it on the subcontinent. Indian Christian religious have traditionally undergone a Western-style religious formation: that is, a period of training and studentship, *brahmacarya* in the Indian sense, before taking the Christian vows of, for example, poverty, chastity and obedience. In so doing, the Christian ascetics I have encountered have generally not undergone a *gṛhastha* (householder) or *vānaprastha* (forest dweller) stage but leapt straight into what could be termed Christian *sannyāsa*.[4] Such Christian *sannyāsīs* may adopt the life of wandering ascetics, such as the late Swami Sadanand or settle in an ashram such as Fr Thomas Kochumuttom CMI, the guru of the Jeevan Dhara ashram in the Himalayas, or Fr Francis Vineeth CMI, the founder of the Vidyavanam ashram in Karnataka.[5] Among women *sannyāsinīs*, the same variation is seen between those who start ashrams such as Vandana Mataji (founder of Jeevan Dhara where Fr Thomas is now the guru), forest dwellers such as Prasanna Devi of Rajkot, Gujarat, and Paulina, a wandering *sannyāsinī* of Rishikesh, and latterly Kerala. For Fr Kochumuttom, all Christians consecrated to the religious life are, by definition, *sannyāsīs/sannyāsinīs*, yet he distinguishes the Christian path from that of, say, Hindu or Buddhist asceticism, as a work of collaboration between the seeker and the Triune God. The seeker must undergo the necessary ascetic training or *tapas*, but they must also be cognisant, as Christians, that such spiritual attainment is dependent upon the action of, and collaboration with, God. What is good in the non-Christian traditions should be adopted, he advises, but always with right discernment to the wider Christian perspective.[6]

This initial survey gives us some idea of the disputed issues around *sannyāsa* and draws out the key areas I propose to explore in this chapter – concentrating

3 In Vedic tradition, as Thottakara points out, the phase of the householder is one of the most revered as he is the one who protects and nourishes people at all the other three phases, providing a safe and stable environment within which the other spiritual work can take place. As it is stated in the *Manusmṛti*, "Of all these four the householder, who performs Vedic and *Smrti* rituals, is the noblest. He indeed protects all the other three. As the rivers find their rest in the ocean, so all the states of life find their support in the householder." (cited in Thottakara, *Sannyāsa,* 567).

4 The encounters detailed in this chapter date from visits to the subcontinent over the past 15 years. Although my conversations and interviews have been informal, I have tried, where possible, to supplement personal communications with texts written by those I have met. During this time, I have encountered Indian Christian ascetics who have undergone the householder and forest-dweller phase too, although by and large, they have never been part of a Christian religious order. I have also encountered Indian Christian ascetics who have left vowed religious life to get married and then moved back into celibate ascetic life later. A more detailed study on these variations could profitably be made in the future.

5 Sadly, since this chapter was written Fr Francis Vineeth passed away (1935–2021). For an appreciation of his life and extraordinary contributions to the establishment of Indian Christian ashram life see CMI Preshitha Province (ed) *Francis Vineeth Vadakethala CMI: Footprints of a Philosopher-Theologian Mystic* (Coimbatore: Little Flower Mission Centre, Bharathiar University, 2021).

6 Personal communication with the author. See also Kochumutton, *Christian Life*.

in particular on the life and writings of Swami Abhishiktananda seen through the eyes of present-day practitioners already introduced. The key questions that need to be assessed can be summarised as follows:

1 How far must the Christian *sannyāsī* follow the traditional Indian *āśramas* or is *sannyāsa* beyond the *āśramas*?
2 At what point does inculturation into a practice such as *sannyāsa* end and the form of Christianity become so misshapen as to be unrecognisable as such?
3 How might Christian *sannyāsa* be lived out today?

From these questions, and the ensuing discussion, I shall outline varying understandings of Christian *sannyāsa* before concluding by essaying the possibility of their development in the contemporary Christian milieu especially in the light of the concerns of the current volume on the possibility of Hindu-Christian dual belonging.

Henri Le Saux/Abhishiktananda

Born in 1910 to a poor Breton family, Henri Le Saux had a long interest in India and Indian spirituality, joining the minor seminary at Châteaugiron in Brittany at an early age in 1921 before entering the Benedictine order at the Abbey of Sainte-Anne de Kergonan in 1929. In 1948, he sailed to India to begin a monastic community with his fellow French priest, Jules Monchanin, their aim being to live the ancient Western monastic life within the frame and ambit of classical Indian ideas, philosophy, and spiritual practice. The monastery they founded in Tamil Nadu, normally called *Shantivanam* (The Forest of Peace), survived their passing and today flourishes, however, while they both lived there it largely remained (as both priests liked it) a quiet and empty hermitage. Both priests began wearing the *kavi* of the Hindu renouncer in the 1950s at which time Henri le Saux took the name Abhiśikteśvarānanda (throughout this chapter, I have used the normal English version of his name, Swami Abhishiktananda, omitting the diacritics).[7] In 1968, Swami Abhishiktananda decided to head north to the source of the Ganges where he spent the final years of his life alternating between a small hermitage he had built there and seeking to convey his message to a new generation of seekers to India.

Still controversial today, nearly half a century after his death in 1973, there are elements in his life and writings that pre-empt our twenty-first-century concerns in a prophetic fashion, especially around dual belonging.[8] From the point of view of the present chapter, his life and writings anticipated most of the questions raised at the onset and an examination of his view on *sannyāsa* will help draw

7 Le Saux attracted many sobriquets and epithets while in India, including "Swamiji."
8 However, it must be noted, on my most recent tour of Northern Uttarakhand "in the footsteps of the swami" mention of his name was greeted with universal approval by Christians, not least from the Bishop and Catholic hierarchy of Bijnor Diocese where he is to this day very much venerated.

conclusions on the central question we are addressing here: is Christian *sannyāsa* possible and what form may it take? As implied by our second aforementioned question, however, the nature and scope of Christian *sannyāsa* is bound up with wider cultural and inter-faith questions as to the nature of Hindu-Christian relations and from this perspective it is worth examining the nature of Le Saux's own encounter with Hindus and Hinduism during his 25 years in India. With his fellow Catholic priest, Jules Monchanin, he had struggled for most of his adult life to reconcile the demands of the lifestyle of the Hindu ascetic with those of his Catholic inheritance and position. The problems and issues that beset him during his relatively short time in India stay with us and if anything have become even more relevant in a world rent by sectarian violence and religious extremism. Le Saux's dilemma remains our contemporary dilemma too: *How can I be true to my origins while reaching out and befriending the "other," in particular the "other" in religious and cultural terms*?

A note on sources

The testimony to Abhishiktananda's journey is held in three sources. First, there are the accounts of the seeker by writers and commentators, many of whom knew him personally and most of which we shall refer to here. Second, there are his numerous writings to a vast and multifaceted public, in particular his books and his letters. The former were published at intervals throughout his life, mostly in French and English, and were usually later derided by the author who grew out of their opinions almost as soon as they were written, becoming increasingly convinced that what he was seeking could not be articulated in traditional prose and discourse. Ultimately, he expressed satisfaction only with the more autobiographical accounts of his encounters with various Hindu mystics and sages such as Śrī Ramana Maharshi and Śrī Jñānānanda.[9] Finally, there is his "confession" – his spiritual diary which he kept assiduously from the first stirrings of his encounter with the Hindu other.[10] Although he possessed a fine theological mind, Abhishiktananda grew increasingly unhappy with theology as a source of wisdom of the divine. As he wrote somewhat acerbically in his diary on 22 January 1956:

> There are two kinds of people who are at peace: Those who have understood nothing of the mystery of God and yet think they have understood it: the theologians.
>
> Those who have "realized" and admit they know nothing of God.

9 Published works referred to, including abbreviations, are listed in the bibliography. Again, hermeneutical problems remain with the redaction of his texts, and some key diaries and texts are still unpublished.

10 For a fuller account of the "confessional" nature of these diaries see P.M. Tyler, *Confession: The Healing of the Soul* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

> What an agony when everything in yourself calls out for realization and when theologians and priests around you – even more, the theologian and priest that you bear within yourself, that you are – threatens you with an "essential loss" if you leave the path of the intellect. And yet Jesus said: "only the one who is ready to lose his soul will find it."[11]

Abhishiktananda's life-long struggle between the fire of his faith and his own "internal priest and theologian" also has much to tell us about how we approach the question of dual belonging in the present volume. His life and work challenge us to step beyond straightforward theological categories into the fire of religious experience lived on the boundary of the two faiths. It is to this we turn next.

The Hindu-Christian encounter

There is no doubt that the young Père Henri, fresh from France, was keen to follow in the footsteps of his missionary forbears and convert Hindus to Christianity. As he wrote in an early entry in his diary on 31 March 1952, he saw Hinduism and Christianity as two distinct religions of which Christianity was definitive and eventually, he was sure, "Hinduism will merge into Christianity."[12] This he came to refer later to as his "fulfillment" view of the relation between the two ancient faiths:

> It is a matter of incorporating into my Christianity all the positive values of Hinduism, thought, worship, devotion, while rejecting only what is clearly and surely incompatible, and of re-interpreting in Christian terms whatever cannot enter just as it is.[13]

"They (the Hindus)," he wrote to his father back in France on 16 September 1948, "cannot understand that it is obligatory to have a definite faith, a fixed creed, and to belong to the Church. The nearer I come to these Hindus, the more I feel them at the same time close to me in their loyal search for God, and far from me in their psychological inability to admit that Christianity is the only authentic means of coming to God."[14]

This was all destined to change for Le Saux a year later as he had his first fateful encounter with the ageing Hindu seer, Śrī Ramana Maharshi, in 1949. Born in 1879 in simple circumstances in Tiruchuzhi in Tamil Nadu, Ramana had first received his experience of *advaita*, or "non-duality" at the age of 17 while

11 *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom H. le Saux),* eds. R. Panikkar, English Trans. D. Fleming and J. Stuart (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1998), 142. Hereafter "Diary."

12 Ibid., 28.

13 Ibid., 28 (31 March 1952).

14 *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told Through His Letters*, ed J. Stuart (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1995), 28. Hereafter "Letters."

having to deal with a violent fear of death.[15] He was left with the fundamental question, "Who am I, really, really?" which he would constantly get his followers to ask themselves, so stripping self-image until all non-essential conceptions of self had been removed. Shortly after this realisation, the seer had withdrawn to the holy mountain of Arunācala in Tamil Nadu which turned out to be not so far from Le Saux's new Christian ashram of *Shantivanam*.[16] Encouraged by their enlightened Bishop, Le Saux and Monchanin paid a visit to Ramana's ashram in January 1949. Yet, Le Saux's first encounter with the ageing guru was, he confessed, an anti-climax: "I felt let down, and in my disappointment, sadness filled my heart."[17] Despite this disappointing first encounter (and considering the young Le Saux's views on Hinduism, such a negative reaction was probably to be expected), a seed had been planted within his heart. This would become something of a pattern in his life and his encounter with the "other." Six months later, he returned to Arunācala only to discover that Ramana was dying of cancer and all audiences had been restricted. As he waited for the *darśana* with the Maharshi, he learnt more of his message from his followers.[18] He was told that:

> The most central point in Śrī Ramana's teaching is the mystery of the heart . . . Find the heart deep within oneself, beyond mind and thought, make that one's permanent dwelling, cut all the bonds which keep this heart at the level of sense and outward consciousness, all the fleeting identifications of what one *is*, with what one *has* or what one *does*.[19]

He was given a verse of the *Upaniṣads* to meditate upon which would remain central to his search for the rest of his time on earth:

> Heaven is within the inner chamber,
> The glorious place,
> Which is entered by those who renounce themselves![20]

15 I take this working definition of *advaita* from Panikkar's, *Opera Omnia*, Volume 1: "nondualism (*a-dvaita*). Spiritual intuition that sees ultimate reality as neither monistic nor dualistic. The recognition that the merely quantitative problem of the one and the many in dialectical reasoning does not apply to the realm of ultimate reality. The latter, in fact, possesses polarities that cannot be divided into multiple separate units; not to be confused with *monism*." R. Panikkar, *Mysticism and Spirituality Spirituality, the Way of Life in Opera Omnia,* Vol. 1, Part 2, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis), 331. Also, see Daniel Soars, "Beyond the Dualism of Creature and Creator: A Hindu-Christian Theological Inquiry into the Distinctive Relation between the World and God." (Doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2019), for a nuanced and provocative contemporary account of *advaita* in Christian context.

16 The name Arunāchala, literally "the rosy one," refers to the beauty of the mountain in the early dawn light. It had become in Tamil lore a watchword for enlightenment and awakening. Dedicated to Lord Śiva it is near the town of Tiruvannāmalai in Tamil Nadu and traditionally understood as one of the *tīrthas* where the column of Śiva's fire or *liṅgam* touches the earth.

17 Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunāchala A Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1979), 5 (hereafter *Secret*). This was one of the few autobiographical accounts that Abhishiktananda prepared for open publication. Many of its passages are directly taken from the *Spiritual Diary*.

18 *Darśana,* literally "a seeing" has in the Sanskrit tradition the nuances of seeing, blessing, and knowledge.

19 *Secret*, 14.

20 *Mahānārāyana Upaniṣad* 12:14.

This cave, or *guhā*, of the heart would become a constant trope in Abhishiktananda's later writings. As well as the metaphorical cave, at this time, he also took the opportunity to acquaint himself with the actual caves of Arunācala and to "meditate in the Indian way."[21] The seed of Arunācala and Ramana would begin to germinate, and for the rest of his life, he would not forget these encounters (Ramana himself passed away two years after Abhishiktananda's visits in 1952). This encounter with Arunācala and its mystic heart would be, he would later admit, the turning point of his life, especially as to how he regarded the relationship between Hinduism and Christianity, and Ramana would remain his ideal of an Indian *sannyāsī* for the rest of his life. From this time onwards, however, an unbearable tension was established in his life which he could rarely confess to unless in his diary or to his closest friends in letters and conversations. In 1969, he would write to Anne-Marie Stokes:

> I find it more and more difficult to see how to integrate Christianity with Hindu experience – and yet this is essential for catholicity. . . . How to carry through the present mutation of Christianity without obscuring its essence?[22]

Abhishiktananda's way: Christian Sannyāsa?

Following his encounter with Arunācala and Ramana, Abhishiktananda spent many years attempting to find a philosophical and theological formulation for his understanding of that struggle before, in his final years, laying aside a concern for theology as traditionally practised as he developed a new *praxis* for living the Christian life in the modern world. As he wrote in his last diary entry on 12 September 1973:

> The Trinity can only be understood in the experience of *advaita*. The Trinity is an experience, not a *theologoumenon* (theological formulation) . . . The Trinity is the ultimate mystery of oneself. But in the very depth of this discovery of the Self-Trinity there lies the paradox: in the mystery of the non-source, who still speaks of the Source?

At this point in his journey, language itself begins to break down for the Swami, leading to the final statement in his Diary:

> The non-awakening, the not-born is manifested by a – what? – a brilliance, a light, a glory that envelops everything, that transcends everything, that seizes one and takes one beyond everything. A sense of "Beyond," of the Beyond.[23]

This passage, or journey, concerns itself in his final writings with the main subject of the present chapter – the nature of *sannyāsa* and whether it was possible for a Christian to live this "renunciation beyond renunciation." This exploration would

21 *Letters*, 31.
22 *Letters*, 218 (24 August 1969).
23 *Diary*, 388 (12 September 1973).

find expression in his last writings on *sannyāsa*, collected together after his death in his final work, "The Further Shore," of 1974.[24] In these last writings, the ancient Indian practice would become for him the ultimate expression of his move beyond theology to a life dedicated to following his "sad-guru," Jesus Christ.

In this respect, he epitomises a dilemma that lies at the heart of religion. On the one hand, the need to codify and direct its manifestations into the channels of civilised life – exemplified by the academic pursuit of theological understanding. On the other hand, there are the wild frontiers of religious experience which, in a way, can never be tamed. In later life, as he encountered the *sādhus* of old India on the banks of the Ganges with their wild dreadlocks and crazy ways, he felt he was encountering once again the original, and dangerous, face of religion. As he wrote to his protégé, the Carmelite sister Thérèse in 1969:

> Remember the hermits of Blessed Albert. The Church needs that witness, which cannot be codified and institutionalized. The deep reason for the present crisis is the exaltation of human laws above the Lord and of theology above experience of God.[25]

At its heart, for the Swami, the spiritual journey becomes a move away from the Western, and what he would often call "Greek," codification of ideas *about* God towards the encounter with the living mystery of God – the turning or *metanoia* that Christ had proclaimed at the beginning of his ministry. He felt that the inability to make this *metanoia* by his contemporaries lay at the centre of the modern crisis of faith and religion. These last writings show how for him traditional theological *praxis* begins to collapse on this "further shore" as we enter the direct encounter with the living mystery of the transcendent:

> To write? To write? What is most true cannot be written, as I have just found by experience at the Phulchatti ashram. When the time comes the Spirit will dictate what should be said. To express that "beyond," theology is no longer sufficient; it requires poetry or its equivalent.[26]

The cosmos certainly conspired to reinforce his new-found resolution when his expensive French typewriter was stolen from his hermitage soon after he wrote this letter – he was never able to use it again. From this time onwards, the awareness of what he termed "I AM" replaced all "christo-logy."[27]

His dissatisfaction with Christianity was such that he could confide in his diary in 1955: "I no longer find any consolation in the Church, not even any help. I keep up the cult out of duty and so recite the formulas I am bound to recite."[28] Yet as

24 Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore, Two Essays by Abhishiktananda* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1975), hereafter "Sannyasa."
25 *Letters*, 215 (26 July 1969).
26 Ibid., 267.
27 Ibid., 310. Letter to Murray Rogers, 2 September 1973.
28 *Diary*, 117 (26 August 1955).

he lost his identification with traditional Christianity after his Arunācala experience, he still felt alienated from the Hindu world. As he wrote in 1955: "Dislocation. Too Hindu to form Christian monks, too Christian to be totally at ease in Hinduism."[29] The dislocation at this time in the mid-1950s became so extreme he even felt he could not go on living:

> I can no longer live as a Christian monk here; and I cannot live as a Hindu monk. May the Lord take pity on me and cut short my life! I cannot take any more.[30]

> I often dream of dying, for it seems there is no way out for me in this life. I cannot be at the same time both Hindu and Christian, and no more can I be either simply Hindu or simply Christian. So what is the point of living? How little heart it leaves me for living.[31]

Statements such as these suggest that what Abhishiktananda expressed could not be simply described as "dual belonging," certainly as discussed in the present volume. As we can see he rejected the idea of belonging to both systems at once. But how could we describe it? Out of this fierce cauldron, torn, as he wrote, "between Arunācala and Rome,"[32] he was ultimately able to forge a new way. Based, as we have seen, not on theology (which at this stage in his journey he found largely unhelpful) but his experience of God especially as conveyed in meditation and prayer. In his later years, he would describe himself as a "bridge" between *advaita* and Christianity, even if, like all bridges, he would have to take the strain of maintaining the tension between the two. Even though his mind, as we have seen, sought an intellectual resolution of the quandary he felt himself in (the "inner theologian"), his heart was slowly drawn to live with the "bridge" experience and the necessary, and hopefully creative, tension that it brought. As he wrote in 1967:

> We have to accept ourselves as the Lord made us. I can neither have a brown skin nor speak an Indian mother-tongue. Instead of lamenting the fact, each has to infer from it where his own vocation lies.[33]

Christian Sannyāsa: a bridge vocation?

This "bridge-vocation" would finally be embodied for him in the notion of the "Christian *sannyāsa*" enumerated in his final writings. In respect to the present volume, we could suggest that this was Abhishiktananda's answer to the dilemmas

29 Ibid., 126 (15 September 1955).
30 Ibid., 148 (21 March 1956).
31 Ibid., 203 (12 April 1957).
32 *Diary* (1958) quoted in S. Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 165.
33 *Letters*, 190.

of Christian-Hindu "dual belonging" presented at the beginning of this chapter. The notion of Christian *sannyāsa* for him transcended the traditional questions of theology and sought to hold the tension of the two great world faiths in the person and life of the seeker. Not an easy vocation for sure, but one, I would like to suggest, that Abhishiktananda believed was important in our present times for those who had the strength to embrace it. Such a Christian *sannyāsa* would, he wrote, communicate "the Hindu message to Christianity and the Christian message to Hindus."[34] This, I would argue, is how Abhishiktananda ultimately came to understand the vocation of Christian *sannyāsa* – that as a bridge vocation between one culture and another. Like the Sufi mystics of old, he would stand on the threshold of the temple but not enter it. In this respect, Enrico Beltramini's work is helpful. In his article *Can One Person Belong to Two Faiths?* he suggests three responses to the "bridge vocation."[35] First, to walk halfway across the bridge and then return to one's starting position, what he terms "singular identity." Second, those who actually consider themselves to be a bridge, what he terms "border identity," and finally those who complete the crossing and "are transformed in the process to the point that they accept the risk of not belonging to either side or of belonging wholly to both sides," what he terms "transcendent identity."[36] As Abhishiktananda was, according to Beltramini, never accepted as a Hindu by Hindus, he classes him as an "invalidated border individual" – one who has attempted to reach the third position of "transcendent identity" but ultimately failing in "reciprocal identification."[37] Although I follow the logic of Beltramini's argument, I would like to suggest that Abhishiktananda's "failure" is actually very instructive in showing those of us who have come afterwards the nature, shape, and construction of the bridge between the two faiths. Abhishiktananda's trajectory, as I have indicated throughout this chapter, lies on the border between theological exposition and spiritual experience and herein lies much of its value. In this respect, one of the most valuable lessons Abhishiktananda received from the Hindu tradition, especially from Ramana, was, as we stated earlier, the need to move in religious observance from "the head" to "the heart." As he put it in the *Secret*: "the most central point in Srī Ramana's teaching is the mystery of the heart . . . Find the heart deep within oneself, beyond mind and thought."[38] In contemporary terms, we could describe this as the move from "theology" to "spirituality" and Abhishiktananda's ultimate focus on Christian *sannyāsa* is, as we shall see in the final part of this chapter, an important means of throwing light on some of the questions we began with, especially regarding the possibility of the existence and vocation of Christian *sannyāsa* and its relationship to dual belonging.

34 Ibid.

35 E. Beltramini, "Can One Person Belong to Two Faiths? The Experience of Three Catholic Monks," *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no. 2 (2014): 103–23.

36 Ibid., 109.

37 Ibid., 118.

38 *Secret*, 14.

Abhishiktananda's Sannyāsa

In his final essay published in "The Further Shore," Abhishiktananda sees *sannyāsa* as embodying the total poverty – mental, spiritual, and physical – that he saw now as the ultimate expression of his following of Christ. From as early as 1952, shortly after his encounter with Arunācala, he had become fascinated with this expression of ascetic surrender that symbolised the final phase of earthly life. As he wrote in his diary in that year:

> The *sannyāsī* has no friends in the proper sense of the word. He has effectively renounced all affections, familial and other . . . that is why the *shastras* forbid the *sannyāsī* to stay more than a few days in the same place. His heart should not be caught by any snare.
>
> I will not be a genuine *sannyāsī* until the day when I am able, without the least distress or fear, to see the loss, in a strange if not downright hostile environment, of all help, all affection, all respect. And that too, on the supposition that I could no longer return to my other life (with its friendships, the priesthood and financial and moral support).[39]

This striking, if not grim, description of *sannyāsa* pits its demands against every certainty and comfort the young priest had ever known and it was an ideal he would pursue in these final years, spurred on by the discovery of a late disciple, the French seminarian Marc Chaduc, whom he would initiate into *sannyāsa* in an "ecumenical" Hindu-Christian ceremony on the banks of the Ganges at Rishikesh in 1973 shortly before his death (which he compares to Jesus' immersion in the Jordan with John the Baptist).[40] From an early stage, Abhishiktananda asked the question: "Does Hindu *sannyāsa* really have an equivalent in Christianity?,"[41] and it was the exploration of this question that would become central to his life for the remainder of his time in India. In this final stage of his life, he became increasingly preoccupied with the silence, solitude, and poverty which he felt lay at the heart of *sannyāsa*, which for him became a complete stripping, a complete emptying:

> *Sannyāsa* involves not only withdrawal from society, from the social and religious framework, from social and religious obligations etc. but also a fundamental commitment beyond the intellectual framework of one's life.[42]

It could be argued that Abhishiktananda's *sannyāsa* was even more extreme than the Hindu version that we described at the beginning of the chapter. The Hindu tradition involves a ritualised stripping away prescribed for certain castes

39 *Diary*, 33 (4 April 1952).
40 *Further Shore*, 52.
41 *Diary,* 88 (7 January 1954).
42 Ibid.

(and indeed gender) only.[43] What Abhishiktananda was advocating, however, was something far more radical – it was a "*sannyāsa* beyond *sannyāsa*" – a stripping away that also included the stripping away of all (of what he saw as) unnecessary religious accoutrements. In 1954, he wrote in his diary that it was the renouncing of "the *nāma rūpa* of himself and of God. . . *sannyāsa*, in its total renunciation and its total liberation, is incompatible with ecclesial Christianity, which does not admit the possibility of itself being transcended."[44] In 1954, it was the transcendence of Christianity that preoccupied him. Twenty years later in his last written essay, *Sannyasa*, he prescribes *sannyāsa* as the "renunciation of renunciation" – it would for him ultimately go beyond every religious form, including Hinduism. At this last stage of his life, it is "beyond all *dharma*, including all ethical and religious duties."[45] His *sannyāsa* was that of the "old ones" "the hairy ones" (*Kesi*) described in the *Ṛig Veda* who predate the niceties of the *Upaniṣads* and their finely tuned Brahminic teaching. No doubt, this attitude was inspired by the wild *swamis* he met on the banks of the Ganges in his own final period of renunciation. At this stage, there is no theology or learning left: such a person has become what he calls a "fire Sannyasi" who "becomes indifferent, on that very day he should go forth and roam."[46] In these last writings, he argues that Christian *sannyāsa* is thus no "fourth asrama"[47] but goes beyond "every state of life" for "Sannyasa is the witness to the final state in which man wakes up" that must be enacted in a form of funeral rite.[48] Abhishiktananda's "acosmic" spirituality was thus becoming a spirituality beyond all spiritualities. This would take him beyond all religious structures, whether Hindu or Christian, to the place he variously called "the source," "I AM," or "the ground." All that was left for him was what he called the "osmosis of prayer" where "the ultimate correspondences – Upanishads – are revealed between the mystery of Christ and that of the Purusha."[49] Ultimately, his goal was a "stripping" – mentally, physically, and spiritually – until nothing was left except the raw encounter with the source:

> Be ready to live in my cave to the end of my life, with no one taking any special care for me or showering me with marks of esteem and honour, obliged to beg each midday for my handful of rice.[50]

43 See Thottakara Sannyāsa and Rabindranath Tagore, "The Fourfold Way of India," reprinted in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, ed. S. Kumar Das, Vol III (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996).
44 *Diary*, 88 (7 January 1954).
45 *Sannyasa*, 18.
46 *Nāradaparivrajaka Upaniṣad*, 3:77 quoted in *Sannyasa*, 22.
47 *Sannyasa*, 4.
48 Ibid., 19–20.
49 *Letters*, 284 (Letter to Marc Chaduc, 21 January 1973).
50 *Diary*, 34 (4 April 1952).

Thus, in his final months, Abhishiktananda saw the life of *sannyāsa* as one stripped beyond all religious forms, living in simplicity in what he repeatedly referred to as the "Fire of Christ." In terms of the discussion of this book, Swamiji's final formulation of Christian *sannyāsa*, in both his writings and his life, does not so much seem to be a case of Hindu-Christian "dual belonging" as rather a Hindu-Christian "Non-Belonging." He seemed in these last years to be straining beyond all categories, especially religious ones, as he retraced the route to the "hairy ones." In this respect, he seems to anticipate so much contemporary fascination with an a-cosmic "spirituality" which will transcend all religious belonging. Is this, then, Abhishiktananda's legacy for the contemporary world?

Abhishiktananda's Sannyāsa – a step too far?

Abhishiktananda's way thus ultimately became the "path beyond all paths." In his lonely journey, he set out to transcend all religious forms. Yet, this path seemed to some others harsh and inhuman. The Swiss ambassador to India, Jacques-Albert Cuttat, had met him in the early 1960s and asked him to initiate a series of conversations between Hindus and Christians, sponsored by his office, which were later published. However, the discussions ended abruptly in 1963. Commenting on Abhishiktananda and his way, Dr Cuttat later wrote:

> Suddenly I realised that something essential was lacking in this *jnanic* way to the Supreme. Everything whatsoever was pervaded with joy and bliss centred in my own Self, the whole reality was luminous and transparent, yet all this happiness was without *love*. There is in this way neither love for God nor love to the other, both are not loved as *others*. Swami Abhish. lives in a happy world of *sacred solitude*. . . . I became incapable to follow again the way of Swami Abhish.[51]

It turned out that Abhishiktananda himself had difficulty living in isolation at Gyansu as a *sannyāsī*, spending half the year there and the other half teaching and travelling in the Plains. His disciple, Marc Chaduc, for whom much of the last essay *Sannyasa* was written (and which he edited) attempted to live the ideal of the "*sannyāsa* beyond *sannyāsa*" only to vanish in 1977, never to be heard of again.[52] To this day, no-one knows what happened to him and theories still circulating include the possibility that he underwent ritual suicide, was murdered, or indeed may still be alive. Likewise, Sr Thérèse vanished with no explanation some years later. Subsequently, Christian theologians have expressed reservations about the later Christology that Abhishiktananda expounded as he entered upon

51 Dr Cuttat to Ilse Friedeberg and Murray Rogers, 8.7.1972, the Murray Rogers Collection quoted in Du Boulay, *The Cave of the Heart*, 184.

52 See Ibid., 229–30.

his life of *sannyāsa*,[53] and Hindus themselves have often not looked favourably on the type of *sannyāsa* presented by Abhishiktananda and his fellow pioneers Jules Monchanin and Bede Griffiths.[54] In this respect, Abhishiktananda's construct of "Christian sannyāsa" can be seen in Beltramini's words as that of an "invalidated border individual." Yet, as I argued earlier, I think it would perhaps be a little harsh to dismiss Abhishiktananda's "experiment" in Christian *sannyāsa* as a total failure.

I began this chapter by posing three questions:

1 How far must the Christian *sannyāsī* follow the traditional Indian *āśramas* or is *sannyāsa* beyond the *āśramas*?
2 At what point does inculturation into a practice such as *sannyāsa* end and the form of Christianity become so misshapen as to be unrecognisable as such?
3 How might Christian *sannyāsa* be lived out today?

Following our review of the life and writings of Abhishiktananda, and drawing upon the discussions with contemporary *sannyāsīs* with which we began, it may now be possible to draw some tentative conclusions. Reviewing the three questions from the perspective of Abhishiktananda's life it seems clear that the "*sannyāsa* beyond *sannyāsa*" that he proposed seems to go beyond that which is acceptable to most Christians today. The mysterious end of the ministries of his two disciples, Marc Chaduc and Sr Thérèse, and the theological objections to some of his later statements on the nature of Christ seem to suggest that some invisible line of inculturation had been passed in his final years. Yet, as I outlined in the previous section, the Swami's life showed throughout a serious dedication to the monastic ideals of silence, solitude, and simplicity in the call to follow his *sad-guru* Christ. This, as suggested earlier, may be a key to understanding how *sannyāsa* may evolve within the contemporary Christian context.

Contemporary Indian writers such as Paul Pattathu have stressed the need for Christian *sannyāsa* to take place within the context of a Christian ashram.[55] Influenced and developed as we have seen by pioneers such as Abhishiktananda, Bede Griffiths, Jules Monchanin, and Fr Francis Acharya, the Christian ashram movement has grown considerably in India in recent years. The ashram itself, as practitioners such as Fr Thomas Kochumuttom describe it, is based on ancient Indian spiritual traditions but has at its heart two basic foundations.

53 See, for example, G. D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990); S. Cheruvally, *Jesus Christ: Quest and Context of Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB)* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2011). Also, D'Costa's chapter in the present volume.

54 For an excoriating critique, see Sita Ram Goel, *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers*? (New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994). The present rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India has also exacerbated these tensions. It is hard to imagine a present-day Henri le Saux having as much freedom to merge with Hindu communities today.

55 See Pattathu, *Ashram Spirituality*.

First, in keeping with the Indian tradition, it is based on the spiritual example of individuals – the original *guru* or holy man/woman – rather than the rules and regulations of an institution. Second, it reflects in its everyday life the values and culture of "village India."[56] Clearly influenced by the pioneering work of Abhishiktananda (not least in the ashram liturgy which incorporates texts and *bhajans* written by the Swami), Fr Kochumuttom adds an extra dimension to the pioneer's three values of silence, simplicity, and solitude, namely openness. In contrast to the Benedictine tradition from which the Breton came, Fr Kochumuttom sees in the ashram "no place for enclosures." For him, "there is nothing either in the persons or the house or the personal rooms that others should not come to know and understand" so that "one is ready to open one's heart or mind (as well as one's room) to anyone who asks" which requires "utter honesty and transparency, sincerity and straightforwardness."[57] On a practical level, the ashram should be furnished simply with cheap furniture and fittings – which would neither be attractive to potential thieves nor require much money to replace if stolen! At Jeevan Dhara ashram, Fr Kochumuttom puts this practice into action and with the three other virtues of silence, solitude, and simplicity creates a stable and peaceful environment where the contemplation of the divine *sat-cit-ānanda* can proceed day and night.

As stated previously, for Fr Kochumuttom, all Christian religious, by virtue of their vows, become *sannyāsī/inī*,[58] yet for vowed or non-vowed, religious or lay, the stable environment of the Christian ashram, centred on the liturgy and the teaching of the guru, seems to offer a secure place where the more wayward demands of *sannyāsa* can be practised. Abhishiktananda was certainly a pioneer and his example continues to inspire many Christian seekers in India today. Yet, in a curious way, he teaches as much by his failures as his successes. For Christians practising *sannyāsa* in India today have learnt that the "further shore" of *sannyāsa*, when it is practised in Christian contexts, needs to be held by the support of the ashram or wider religious community. In the Indian tradition, as we have seen, the *sannyāsī* "owns no place and no person and has to be by definition a solitary wanderer."[59] The Christian, in contrast, by virtue of their consecration to Christ, remains in service to the world even though they do not identify with the world's goals and aims.[60] Yet, in spite of the differences between the extreme Hindu version of *sannyāsa* (as attempted to be practised by Abhishiktananda) and the Christian versions of active holiness, it is possible to see both Indian *sannyāsa* and Christian spiritual life as two aspects of the final encounter and relationship with the ultimate goal of human life – our encounter with the limit of human

56 For a deeper exposition, see Kochumuttom, *Christian Life Amidst Many Religions*, especially 46.
57 Ibid., 46.
58 Ibid., 81.
59 Thottakara, *Sannyāsa*, 561.
60 Although, as Thottakara notes, in recent years, Buddhists, Hindus, and Jains have all taken to more communitarian models of *sannyāsa* imitating in many ways Christian monastic models of service to the world, the poor, and downtrodden (*Sannyāsa*, 562).

mortality. Thottakara calls it "the Yoga mind" that integrates apparently bipolar realities and he mentions Fr Francis Vineeth CMI, founder of the Vidyavanam ashram near Bengaluru, as an example of a modern *sannyāsī* "who tries to awaken the religious-spiritual consciousness of the *sadhakas* and develop in them a soul culture that is deeply rooted in the age old principles of Indian spirituality and in the immensely rich Christian spiritual traditions without at the same time negating the positive values of matter, body and this world."[61]

This is not to say that there is no longer any room for the wandering Christian ascetic in today's modern India. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the rich life of Swami Sadanand, a Christian *sannyāsī*, who died in 2016. This remarkable Christian ascetic had spent his whole life, since taking the robe of a *sannyāsī*, pursuing justice and truth for the poorest and most alienated in India while also practising the deep ascetic and meditational life of a *sādhu*. He famously befriended the murderer of a Catholic nun, Sr Rani Maria, while the offender served his time in prison so that when he was released, and repented his crimes, he was accepted into the late nun's family. Such was the fame of this reconciliation that Pope Francis invited Swami Sadanand, the nun's murderer and family to Rome in 2014. I had the great good fortune to meet Swamiji shortly before his death, and his presence and life were indeed a convincing testimony to the possibility of Christian *sannyāsa* in the twenty-first century.

Conclusions

I began this chapter by asking, "how far must the Christian *sannyāsī* follow the traditional Indian *āśramas* or is *sannyāsa* beyond the *āśramas*?" By adopting some of the order and setting of mainstream consecrated life as described in the previous section, there is always the danger that contemporary Christian *sannyāsa* might lose one key aspect of the traditional Indian fourth *āśrama*: that it was essentially a development from "lay" status and in fact was intimately connected with the development of the rounded individual through the passage from student to householder to renouncer as described earlier.

In this respect, Fr Francis Vineeth suggests that the heart of the renunciation required by the *āśrama* system is *samādhi*. A term deriving from the Sanskrit terms *sama* (equal) and *dhi* (mind) which Vineeth describes as a "steadiness of mind obtained not merely by the mastery over the faculties through which distractions enter but more by being in touch with the Divine, the Lord who abides in the cave of one's heart."[62] Here, the disposition of the practitioner is the most important matter rather than the state or way of life. For Vineeth, Jesus Christ displays the ultimate manifestation of *samādhi* in the Gospels, not least in his Passion. He suggests that *samādhi* leads to genuine freedom, the sign of true spirituality, a person in this state "is no more a slave of his impulses, not even of 'good' desires.

61 Ibid., 558.

62 F. Vineeth, *The Asian Vision of God* (Bangalore: Vidyavanam, 2004), 159.

He submits himself totally to the divine will."[63] "How does one achieve that state?" asks Vineeth, to which he replies: "it is because he has crossed over to the other side of life and discovered the true hidden treasure of his life. He is a *thirthankara*, one who has crossed over the river of life. It is on this side of the river, in the world of objects whether of senses or mind, that we are pulled hither and thither," but once we have crossed over, we inhabit "a world of light and delight as one experiences the Lord as the ultimate source of all bliss and beatitude."[64] From this perspective, Christian *sannyāsa*, as the relationship to the Trinity through the bliss of the Spirit, becomes a possibility for all Christian seekers, not just the vowed religious.

In conclusion then, the pioneering journeys of "Hindu-Christian" seekers such as Abhishiktananda show, as interpreted by later *sannyāsīs*, such as Fathers Vineeth and Kochumuttom, that *sannyāsa*, the ultimate renunciation, *is* possible for Christian seekers but that such a renunciation seems to most fruitfully develop within the context and style of the community of believers, which in modern India will often be found in the Christian ashram.[65] Within such a communal setting the spirit of *sannyāsa*, whether Vineeth's *samādhi*, Kochumuttom's "openness," or Abhishiktananda's "cave of the heart" remains recognisably "Christian" as it shifts the emphasis of the believer's life from "theological" and conceptual exposition of Christian mysteries to the actual living out of the Christian mystery through a *praxis* of spirituality. As exemplified in the life of Swami Sadanand, this can also be combined with a deep commitment to social (or environmental) justice while exercising the necessary "indifference" of *samādhi* towards the created world. This chapter has shown that Christian *sannyāsa* is indeed alive and thriving in present-day India where the network of Christian ashrams and believers gives it the support it requires. Abhishiktananda's "failure," if indeed it was one, was to be a pioneer, one who strode the path before many of his fellow Indian Christians had trod it. A true *tīrthaṅkara*, he forded the first steps in a river which surely will now be followed by others seeking to heal the breach in their own souls, the soul of Christianity and the soul of our divided world.

References

Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux)

Diary: *Ascent to the Depth of the Heart: The Spiritual Diary (1948–1973) of Swami Abhishiktananda (Dom H. le Saux)*. Edited by R. Panikkar, English Translated by D. Fleming and J. Stuart. New Delhi: ISPCK, 1998.

63 Ibid., 164.

64 Ibid., 161.

65 In a way, this conclusion should not be so surprising as we stated at the onset the prescribed conditions within which Hindu *sannyāsa* has traditionally evolved and within which it continues to take place. Perhaps, this chapter is testimony to the strength and vigour of contemporary Indian Christianity that it can now support a new generation of Christian *sannyāsinīs/sannyāsīs* in a manner which was not so straightforward in Abhishiktananda's lifetime.

Letters: *Swami Abhishiktananda: His Life Told Through His Letters*. Edited by J. Stuart. New Delhi: ISPCK, 1995.

Sannyasa: *Sannyasa in The Further Shore, Two Essays by Abhishiktananda*. New Delhi: ISPCK, 1975.

Secret: *The Secret of Arunācala: A Christian Hermit on Shiva's Holy Mountain*. Abhishiktānanda. New Delhi: ISPCK, 1979.

Beltramini, Enrico. "Can One Person Belong to Two Faiths? The Experience of Three Catholic Monks." *Studies in World Christianity* 20, no. 2 (2014): 103–23.

Cheruvally, Santhosh Sebastian. *Jesus Christ: Quest and Context of Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux OSB)*. New Delhi: ISPCK, 2011.

Citations from the Christian and Hindu scriptures from *The Holy Bible: The New Revised Standard Version* (London: Harper, 2007) and *Hindu Scriptures*. Translated by R.C. Zaehner (London: Dent, 1966) with modifications as necessary.

CMI Preshitha Province (ed).*Francis Vineeth Vadakethala CMI: Footprints of a Philosopher-Theologian Mystic* (Coimbatore: Little Flower Mission Centre, Bharathiar University, 2021).

D'Costa, Gavin, ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990.

Du Boulay, Shirley. *The Cave of the Heart: The Life of Swami Abhishiktananda*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005.

Goel, Sita Ram. *Catholic Ashrams: Sannyasins or Swindlers?* New Delhi: Voice of India, 1994.

Kochumuttom, Thomas. *Christian Life Amidst Many Religions*. Bengaluru: Dharmaram, 2015.

Monier-Williams, Monier. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2012.

Olivelle, Patrick. *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Panikkar, Raimon. *Mysticism and Spirituality, Vol. 1, Part 2 Spirituality, The Way of Life in Opera Omnia*. Edited by M. Carrara Pavan. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014.

Pattathu, Paul. *Ashram Spirituality: A Search into the Christian Ashram Movement Against Its Hindu Background*. Indore: Satprakashan, 1997.

Rajan, Jesu. *Bede Griffiths and Sannyāsa*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1997.

Soars, Daniel. "Beyond the Dualism of Creature and Creator: A Hindu-Christian Theological Inquiry into the Distinctive Relation between the World and God." Doctoral thesis, Cambridge University, 2019.

Tagore, Rabindranath. "The Fourfold Way of India." Reprinted in *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore*, edited by S. Kumar Das, vol. III. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996.

Thottakara, Augustine. "*Sannyāsa*: Dynamics of a Life of Renunciation." In *New Horizons of Indian Christian Living*, edited by S. Chackalackal. Bengaluru: Vidyavanam, 2009.

Tyler, Peter M. *Confession: The Healing of the Soul*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017.

Vineeth, Francis. *The Asian Vision of God*. Bangalore: Vidyavanam, 2004.

Index

Abhishiktananda: biography 195; Christian *sannyāsa* 199–207; meeting Ramana Maharshi 197–9; sources 196; struggle with non-dualism (advaita) 54–5, 131–2; *see also* bridge vocation
Advaita Vedānta: and Abhishiktananda 198–9; conversion and mission 126–36; and Francis X Clooney 107–8; historical background 188–9; and Kazi Nazrul Islam 98–9; logical implications for dual belonging 54–8; and Raimon Panikkar 42–5; and Sara Grant 190–1
Arya Samaj 90, 92
ashram 91, 194, 206–9; *see also* Christa Prema Seva Ashram; Sat Tal Ashram (STA); Shantivanam
āśrama (stage of life) 193–5, 204, 206, 208
avatāra (and incarnation) 59, 90, 100, 102

belonging (*vs*. 'existing' or 'identifying') 159–65
Beltramini, Enrico 202, 206
bhakti (devotion) 38, 42–4, 46–7, 62, 64, 151
brahmins 16, 18–19, 22–3, 26–7, 30
bridge vocation 201–2

caste 16–20, 24, 26–30
Catholic Committee for Religious Relations with the Jews 71
Chaduc, Marc 203, 204n48, 205–6
Chinmaya Mission 127–8, 136
Chinmayananda, Swami 123, 127–8, 134
Christa Prema Seva Ashram 177–81
Christianity in India (Indian Christianity) 59, 84n46, 89n3, 187
Clooney, Francis X. 2n3, 8–9, 13; comparative reading 109–13; multiple religious belonging 114–20, 159–60; and Raimon Panikkar 34, 38–9; understanding of comparative theology 106–8
community 4–5, 118; and conversion 148–9; *see also* belonging (*vs*. 'existing' or 'identifying'); Hebrew Catholics; Nasrani; Nazrul Islam, Kazi; St. Thomas (Marthoma) Christians
comparative theology *see* Clooney, Francis X.
conversion: into Hinduism 92; and identity 149, 154; Jewish conversion to Christianity 72; and St. Thomas the Apostle 17, 23; theoretical models of 124–6; violence 122–3, 147–8; *see also* Advaita Vedānta; Newman, John Henry
Cornille, Catherine 1–2, 70n4, 92–3, 114, 135, 184–5
cosmotheandrism (cosmotheandric mystery) 36, 48

de iure/*de facto* 76–9, 81
dialogue 2–3, 9, 34–8, 48, 74n13, 76n25, 160, 166
Diller, Jeanine 159–61, 163, 171

Easter 180–2
exclusivism 11, 81
extra ecclesiam nulla salus (no salvation outside the Church) 11, 75–6

Feldmeier, Peter 159–61, 164n14, 171
feminist (approaches) 186

Gooren, Henri 125–8, 130, 132
Goswami, Bijoy Krishna 66–7
grace 60, 63–4, 78, 81–2, 190
Grant, Sara: life and work 177–8; *see also* Advaita Vedānta; Christa Prema Seva Ashram

Harrison, George 149
Hebrew Catholics 11–12, 71–4, 85

identity 1, 7–9, 12; cultural *vs*. religious 187; Hindu notions of 18; inner and outer 140–9, 184–5; theoretical frameworks 159–63; *see also* Hebrew Catholics; Judaism; reading (comparative)
imparative method 38–9, 41, 48
inclusivism 11, 80–1
inculturation 69n3, 81–2, 118–19; *vs*. belonging 178–83
Islam 93, 96, 99–100, 132, 153

James, William 142, 145–6
jñāna (knowledge) 38, 44, 46–7
Jones, E. Stanley 165–7
Judaism 71–4, 185–6

Kochumuttom CMI, Fr Thomas 193n1, 194, 206–7, 209
K, 20 (Krishna) 53–4, 59, 62–5, 67

Le Saux, Henri *see* Abhishiktananda
Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some Aspects of Christian Meditation 82, 182
līlā 63–4
Lonergan, Bernard J.F. 124–6, 129
Long, Jeffery 129

magisterium 11, 69, 74, 76, 78, 85, 151
Maharishi Mahesh Yogi 127, 130–1
Malabar (Christians) 12, 16–22, 24–30
Malankara (Christians) 19–21, 25–6, 29–30
Malkovsky, Bradley 176–7, 181n30
manas (Spirit) 41–2, 46–7, 49
margam (path/way of life) 25, 29
Marthoma *see* St. Thomas (Marthoma) Christians
Min, Anselm 34
mission/missionaries 21–4, 29, 57, 79–80, 90–1, 122, 148, 179; *see also* Chinmaya Mission; conversion; Jones, E. Stanley; Ramakrishna Mission/Order; St. Thomas (Marthoma) Christians
Mysorekar, Uma 148

Nairs 16, 25, 27, 30
Nasrani 12–13, 19–30
Nazrul Islam, Kazi 13, 93–103
Newman, John Henry 12, 142, 144–7, 154

Orientalism 91, 176, 188

Panikkar, Raimon 12, 54, 77n30, 184n45, 198n14; between worlds 45–50; life and work 33–7; religious experience 38; Word and Spirit 39–44
participation: *vs*. belonging 150–2, 158; fruit of comparative reading 113–14, 120; levels of 125; in work of Jeanine Diller 160
Plantinga, Alvin 60–1
pluralism: and conflicting truth claims 66n38; and Raimon Panikkar 34, 48; and Ramakrishna 65; and RC doctrine 77–8, 80
postcolonial 185–7
Pravrajika Vrajaprana 128–9
prayer 4, 131n50, 150–1, 182–3

Ramakrishna 100–3, 142, 150, 153–4
Ramakrishna Mission/Order 123, 127–9
Ramana Maharshi 12, 127–8, 131, 196–8
Rambo, Lewis 125–7, 130, 132–4
reading (comparative) 109, 112–13
Redemptoris Missio 179, 182
religious experience: and Abhishiktananda 200; and belonging 135; and Panikkar 37–9, 44, 48; and William James 146n14, 146n15
Roman Catholicism: and dual belonging 70, 84; and Jeffery Long 143; Portuguese 17; *see also* Abhishiktananda; Clooney, Francis X.; Grant, Sara

salvation 64, 75–8, 81, 150–1; *see also extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the Church)
sannyāsa: and Abhishiktananda 199–201, 203–8; Christian forms of 201–2, 208–9; nature of 193–5
Sarasvati, Swami Dayananda 90, 122, 127–8, 148
Sat Tal Ashram (STA) 13, 157, 165–7
SBNR ('spiritual but not religious') 7, 142
Second Vatican Council 36, 39, 73, 75–6, 79, 80nn40–1, 176, 178
Shantivanam 195, 198
Spiritual Exercises (Ignatian) 116
spirituality: in Abhishiktananda 204–5; different forms of 42–3; in Raimon Panikkar 35–7; in Sara Grant 177
St. Thomas (Marthoma) Christians 12, 16–24, 89
syncretism 83, 106, 120, 183
Syrian Christianity 17–21, 25n34, 26–30

Teape lectures 176n4
Theology Without Walls (TWW) 7n8, 8n11, 159, 164, 165n17, 165n19, 168
Transcendental Meditation 127, 130
Trimārga 38
Trinity 12, 36–9, 41–4, 46, 48, 199

Upadhyay, Brahmabandhab 89, 90n5

vāc (Word) 41, 46, 49
Vaiord) 53–4, 56, 66, 108, 115
Vallabha 62–4
Vedānta: centres/societies 101, 123, 129; in work of Francis X Clooney 107–8; *see also* Advaita Vedānta; Ramakrishna; Vivekananda, Swami
Vedas 36, 38, 45
Vineeth CMI, Fr Francis 194, 208–9
Vivekananda, Swami 101, 123, 133, 153n27

Whitehead, Alfred North 142–3
worldview 57–8, 60–1, 129, 140–1, 145–6

Taylor & Francis eBooks

www.taylorfrancis.com

A single destination for eBooks from Taylor & Francis with increased functionality and an improved user experience to meet the needs of our customers.

90,000+ eBooks of award-winning academic content in Humanities, Social Science, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Medical written by a global network of editors and authors.

TAYLOR & FRANCIS EBOOKS OFFERS:

- A streamlined experience for our library customers
- A single point of discovery for all of our eBook content
- Improved search and discovery of content at both book and chapter level

REQUEST A FREE TRIAL

support@taylorfrancis.com

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

CRC Press
Taylor & Francis Group